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SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 543. FOR WEEK ENDING MAY 27TH, 1899. [ONE PENNY.

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By E. MILLS.

II.—A DAY WITH "MISS KIT."

"Miss Kit" was becoming quite accustomed to dressing by candlelight in that little verandah-room of hers at her uncle's station. Every morning when the station-bell clanged out the summons to the working day, Miss Kit ran to her door and peeped out at the faintly primrose east, and listened to the wild-duck flying in startled squads over the house as the black boy ran the horses through the ford of the winding creek. And then Kit and her uncle would eat a hurried breakfast in the big, dark dining-room, where the night shadows still lurked, and where Kit shivered in spite of the cape thrown over her trimly-built, dark-green habit.

Once in the saddle, however, with the red sun rays turning the woolshed windows to gold, and the thin smoke just beginning to rise from the cottages along the creek, she forgot that there were such thing as chilly downs and dark night shadows, for Miss Kit was only nineteen, and was having her first experience of cattle-station life, and the delights of spending whole days with the musterers. And the intoxication of the fresh morning breeze that has been sweeping over so many wide miles of country destitute (save for the home of a boundary rider or so) of human habitation, is a thing to be remembered for ever by those who have known it on the warm, fresh mornings of the Australian spring.

Martini Downs was a cattle station, and the mustering parties were large ones. Miss Kit knew most of the men, white and black, by name, now, and expected to be kept supplied in all "station information" by Chris Lee, the jackaroo, who rode with her when the boss was otherwise engaged. Sweet-faced Sydney girls were not a glut in the district, and Miss Kit's advent had created an excitement whose waves spread further than one might imagine.

She was not pretty exactly, but had a dear, round, little figure, and that gift of the gods (both of the upper and under worlds) "fascination," and was a flirt—not of circumstances only, but a flirt ingrained—through and through, from the top of her dusky-haired head to the tip of her small, neat shoes; and like all true flirts slightly cold-hearted, and not easily moved by the passions of herself or others.

She could no more help flashing long George Gordon (the head stockman) one of her slow, dreamy glances from her grey-black lashed eyes, when he picked the hoya for her, than she could have helped blinking if she looked at the sun, although she had, naturally, a strong bias of conservatism in her nature, which her life, as a rich, retired squatter's only daughter, had helped to foster.

Lee saw the glance, and said: "Isn't Gordon a fine-looking fellow, Miss Kit. By George, I wish I could ride one half as well as he can. He's a bit superior to the usual run of working men, too: reads a lot, you know."

"Ah!" said Miss Kit. "yes, he is good-looking: it's his figure and height chiefly, you know, and the picturesque cabbage-tree and 'get-up' altogether. Yes, he is a fine animal."

"Are you a beauty lover, Miss Kit?"

"I worship it—perhaps because I'm not beautiful myself. No, stop—I'm not fishing for a compliment, and nothing could undo a lesson I learnt once. Oh! a year ago, when I was staying near Euston, three of us had gone for a walk—myself, a girl friend of mine, who was seventeen and very beautiful, and a friend, a man friend, who—well, who cared for me, then. We came to a little stream, the sort that one is always coming across in New England country, smothered in wild violets and maiden-hair, and crawling with snakes and death-adders. No, don't look pleasantly excited, there isn't going to be a tragedy of any kind, only a moral lesson.

"Well, I jumped over it, and so did the man, and my girl friend, who was really timid, stood stock-still, her colour coming and going—such a colour, red as the heart of a damask rose, and her lovely little mouth was red, too, and she had the whitest of teeth, and the bluest of eyes, like stars, and the brightest, golden curls on her forehead, and was, moreover, largely made and well-developed, although she was so young—are you listening, Mr. Lee?"

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The gallop brought them level with the boss again.

"Oh, yes: but I was just going to say that all fellows don't admire tall girls," with a languishing glance at Miss Kit's diminutive figure.

"So my man friend assured me, thus my moral will suit both. Of course he ran to the rescue, and took my girl friend's hands. I wonder if you could realise the picture better if I told you that she was dressed in white and wore a white sun-bonnet, with lacy frills round her lovely, innocent face.

"And he looked at her as he helped her across—please remember that he was really fond of me—and that we both knew the beautiful friend was about as intellectual as a sheep, and quite as hopelessly stupid. Still, for all that, there was a look in the man's eyes which will never be in any man's eyes for me. Love, tenderness, passion, I have seen them all, but not the adoration, the worship—call it what you will—that comes to most men's eyes when they see a really beautiful woman; it's something quite distinct and apart from love."

"Were you jealous?" hazarded Chris. He did not quite understand his divinity always.

"Of course I was, wickedly jealous of her beauty; that was all, of course, for I knew the man liked me and always would. I saw the girl the other day; she was already beginning to run to the 'fleshy' and florid style, but oh, she was beautiful two years ago. All this is *à propos* of what—oh! George Gordon, the stockman, just to explain, you know, that we can worship the beauty, and not the man himself, or was it to explain the craving and longing all women have for personal loveliness. Beauty is only skin deep, Mr. Lee, so you men write, but your eyes tell a different tale. Now, please, don't say you have never liked pretty girls, hoping to reassure and compliment me—now, confess, you were just going to."

"I was, Miss Kit, and I mean it, too: somehow or other I never did——"

"Oh! race me down the hill," cried Kit, "and don't make it worse than ever. My sex is credited with having very little sense of humour, but I have my doubts if it's all on one side. Come on, Mr. Lee, Starlight is simply mad for a gallop."

The gallop brought them level with the boss again.

"The river paddock is a large one," he said, "keep near Lee, Kit, and if you knock up, he can ride home with you. We shall all divide after we leave these slip-rails."

"Knock up!" said Kit, scornfully, and she made a little move towards the keen-faced old Scotsman, who was her present guardian, and quite made up her mind to give young Lee the slip as soon as possible. She did not approve of being treated as a baby, and to be put in the charge of Chris Lee, who was no older than herself, with his boyish face and sunny curls, and ridiculous, pinky complexion, that never would burn brown, added largely to the insult; and so it was, when the sliprails passed and the men had scattered in various directions, that Miss Kit spied a white steer "just disappearing" into the reeds of a distant swamp.

"You haven't found one yet," said Kit, reproachfully: "in fact, I don't see how you could, very well, when you look at me all the time. Now, I suppose George Gordon and the other men will find hundreds."

Goaded into action by this veiled sarcasm, young Chris put spurs to his horse and galloped to the swamp, shouting to Kit to wait for him in the brigalows. No sooner was he out of sight than, giving Starlight her head, Miss Kit made off in a northerly direction, hoping to reach the river and appear at the camping-ground by dinner-time, in a manner befitting her independence.

Some hours later, long George Gordon the stockman, riding leisurely along the banks of the big Barwon River, came upon a gossamer veil hanging on the end of a branch, which overhung the cattle-track. He had seen that veil before, and in fact, had been thinking of its owner pretty continually during the last few days. There was a wide social gulf between Miss Kit, the rich station-owner's niece, who had been home to England and back, besides her other claims to exclusiveness, and George Gordon, his head stockman, and son to old Gordon, the shepherd of earlier days; but for all that, they were man and woman, and had been thrown together a good deal in one way and another during the mustering.

And there is a strange spell about an open-air life in the wide Australian bush that acts as a leveller to social distinctions.

Above all, Miss Kit was a flirt, and famed for her talent of being "all things to all men." That intuition which she trusted so rightly told her what style of woman this big fellow would most admire, so that when in his company she half-unconsciously became that woman. As for the man, it seemed to him that the ideal woman of his inmost thoughts had taken shape and substance.

Once he helped her to remount Starlight, and had glowed all over because her little foot lay in his hand a moment before she went up light as a bird.

Once she had asked him to get her some hoya flowers, and had smiled graciously when he brought them. Yes:

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that was all that had passed between them, but hot young blood takes fire easily, and the fire that never dies was lighted in George Gordon's breast and all his common-sense and reason could not quench it.

This was her gossamer, so she had been this way—strange, for when they all camped for dinner further up the river Miss Kit and Chris Lee had not turned up, and the boss had smiled triumphantly, saying:

"Ah, I thought the lassie was a bit tired, though she wouldn't own it, and no doubt finds her hammock and the grape-vines cooler than the river flats. But if they had passed this way they could not be home yet."

Still puzzling, Gordon untwisted the veil and put it in the bosom of his shirt, and pursued his way. A shrill neigh brought an answering one from his horse, who was a paddock companion of Miss Kit's favourite, Starlight: and seized with indefinable dread, Gordon galloped towards a grassy delta from which the sound came. The water had in some bygone flood cut deep hollows, and left ragged knolls (now covered with coarse, tussocky river grass) in the soft, silted soil, and the whole place and the flats beyond were golden with large, yellow buttercups.

Starlight, with trailing bridle, was feeding quietly about on a knoll, below which, comfortably settled among the tussocks and reeds lay Miss Kit.

"Oh!" she cried, "I am so glad you have come, George. I'm sure it's ages past dinner time, and I'm so hungry. Where are the others?"

"Camped long ago, miss—further up—why, you must have mistaken the place!"

"I thought Mr. Lee said the first bend I came to after leaving the brush fence. Isn't this it?"

"Well, it is, and it isn't, miss—you see you've turned round and gone down instead of up. Let me make you some tea before you start home. I've my quart here."

"Ah, do! I'm dreadfully thirsty. And so I've missed the others altogether. Why, Gordon, it's a mercy you found me. I might have stayed here all night."

"Very likely," said George, soberly, as he gathered the sticks. "Your uncle thought you was home long ago."

George Gordon's grammar was decidedly faulty, although his voice, being rich and soft, hid the defects of speech a little—and Kit noticed the slip and smiled. She felt she could unbend a little as none of the other men or her right and proper chaperons were about, and the man was so undeniably handsome, although his skin was browned to the colour of dried apples.

Chris Lee was his superior in birth, breeding and wealth no doubt, but she was tired of callow boys (only women far older than Kit can really stand and appreciate the freshness and inexperience of adolescence) and it would be a change to talk to a working man on terms that were something like equality—and to find out if they really thought and acted quite differently from the men whom society destined as her companions.

Gordon made some good bush tea, and the girl found cake and ginger-bread and a sandwich in her saddle-bag, and insisted upon his taking some for afternoon tea, as she called it. Gordon let the still unmustered end of the river paddock "slide" and gave himself up to the dangerous pleasure of doing Queen Kit's bidding and "talking."

"Was he fond of reading?" she asked.

"Yes: of course he was—what bushman is not—he was reading a novel then, called 'His Heart's Desire' there was a lot in it about England—it must be a wonderful place—had Miss Kit seen any of the old houses or castles that had belonged to the same chap's family for hundreds of years?"

George Gordon . . . came across a gossamer veil hanging on the end of a branch.

Yes, Kit had stayed in one of them, a manor-house, really old, with a moat and drawbridge.

"But, for my part," said she, "I hate those old, uncomfortably built places; the rooms seemed full of ghosts, who scowled to see their things touched by irreverent, living, modern hands. There is such a musty sense of tragedies and bygone lives that should have been forgotten long ago. It's a thing one can't explain, some people call it a 'a special charm,' but I would far rather have a nice house built in my own lifetime according to my own ideas, than all the ill-drained castles and ghost-haunted old houses in Christendom. That's why I like Martini Downs so much," she said, "it's a comparatively new station yet, and hasn't any memories or tragedies."

"No," said Gordon, "it's been a lucky station in that way; no accidents to speak of. But I'd like to see one of them castles that the plucky chaps used to defend in old days, and a fellow would like to have one belonging to his people."

"No doubt you come of some of those old fighting Gordons, George—gipsy Gordons, you know. Now I come to think of it, mine is a gipsy name, too, Heron. Gordon and Heron. No wonder we are enjoying this picnic, gipsy's picnic, all the year round."

Gordon smiled, showing his strong, even, white teeth.

"There was a tale that my grandfather was a gipsy. I've heard tell—don't know—Miss Kit, but I think he was lagged for stealing a horse, anyway, I don't think I ever heard of a castle belonging to him!" And he laughed again.

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"Of course, he was a gipsy, George: and that is where you get your black eyes and black hair from. So you like old castles and musty ancestors —and I hate them, another of Fate's mistakes—you should be in my place, and I in yours. I can tell you I shocked the aunts and cousins at Herne Manor House. I wish I had your reverence—take off your hat, George and let me see if the bump is well-developed."

The young bushman took off his cabbagetree hat, and bent his head as directed: it was a shapely head, and Kit tapped it critically with one forefinger, just above the forehead.

"Yes: it's there," she said, "George, I'm afraid from what I can see also, that you are dreadfully serious and sentimental—I might have known it when you told me

He caught her in his arms again.

you enjoyed reading books with a title like 'His Heart's Desire.' What is your heart's desire, George, wealth, love, fame?"

But George looked away across the river, through the green aisles of the wooded flats, and was silent.

"You know what I mean," continued Kit, "they say everyone wants something more than anything else in the world, that if they were to have one wish, one only, gratified it would be that."

"Yes, Miss Kit, I do know what you mean."

"Ah! of course, well, your heart's desire is a very moderate one, I suppose—the overseership of Martini Downs, or a snug little place of your own, something, at any rate, that there is a possibility of being gratified?"

George rose and leant against the steep bank of the knoll before he replied. Miss Kit looked really pretty lying back amongst the feathery grasses; her hat had fallen off, and the warmth of the day had brought a rosy flush to her usually pale cheeks.

"A while back," he said slowly, "I don't think I fancied anything much, saving it was a bit of a selection of my own when I was too stiff and old to break in horses."

"And now?" The big grey eyes were questioning his own.

"Well, now it's different; I do want something—so badly that if I would have it and break my neck the moment after I got it, why I'd jump at the offer."

"Then I'm afraid there's a woman at the bottom of it—it is love after all that you want. Now, my heart's desire is so complex—so utterly impossible; I want happiness, beauty, power—oh! and a thousand things; I should never know which to choose. Now you only want a certain woman's love."

"I never said I wanted her love, Miss Kit: I don't know as I do want that, it would mean misery to her, and to me through her. She's not meant for such as me—it's best as it is."

"Then your heart's desire should be to be of such as are meant for her!"

"That's again impossible, Miss Kit; you can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear."

I'm afraid Gordon pronounced the last word "year." But Kit had forgotten to be critical. She was charmed with this "new experience,"—this man who could follow her wayward fancies so easily, whose respectful manner altered not one jot although she was talking to him so freely.

And, above all, she was a beauty lover, and Gordon was very handsome. And more than that still Kit was a flirt, and if you put a duck in water you cannot blame it for swimming, and there was no one to remind her that she was making herself as charming as possible to her uncle's head stockman.

Then again, it was Australian noontide, and clouds of little white butterflies were dancing over the long reaches of buttercups, amongst which, on dry oases of ground, were islands of blue-bells and strips of white everlasting daisies, and the grass of the big swamp lower down was all dimpling with the breeze. That breeze was an excuse in itself, so intoxicating was the scent it bore with it from the groves of wattle and wild white jasmine.

"It must be a woman's love," said the girl. "Now tell me, George."

"No, Miss Kit"—gently, but firmly—"I can't do that."

"But you will tell me some day," coaxingly.

"No, I'm certain I never will."

"Oh, this is exciting," said Kit, adding to herself, "It must be Anna, the housemaid, she is always especially attentive to me; perhaps they want uncle to raise his wages."

"Could I help you to it?" she said aloud.

"Yes."

"Good gracious, have you wanted it for long?"

"No, yes; that is, more to-day than ever before, Miss Kit."

Miss Kit must have been very certain of the reliability of her intuitions as applied to this earnest-eyed young stockman, quite certain that he would take no advantage of her condescending familiarity, for she laughed long and merrily at his last words.

"Why, George, I believe it haunts your dreams," she said.

Gordon sprang up from his lowly seat at her feet, and

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flung his arms out with a passionate, unstudied gesture.

"Night and day," he cried. "Night and day, if I live to be a hundred, Miss Kit, I'll be no nigher it, and I'll want it my whole life long."

She was really curious, and sprang to her feet too, her habit falling all about her, in long, sloping folds. Alas, her besetting sin was curiosity (no doubt it helped to make her sweetly sympathetic), and forgetting all else under its influence she stretched out both her little gloveless hands and seized his big sun-browned ones, and looking up eagerly into his face:

"Tell me. It is the only thing I have ever asked you. Tell me," she cried.

When a certain point is reached in temptation, the average man yields; the point is an indefinite one, sometimes near, sometimes so far that it is scarcely touched. Gordon was twenty-five, strong, warm-blooded, and deeply in love, and the touch of those small, white, fluttering hands caused him to forget everything except that they were man and woman—everything except that his heart was filled with despairing love, that found its out et in the words:

"Yes, I will tell you—Heaven—but I love you, Miss Kit—love you too much to want you to love me. One kiss, that's all I want—one kiss, that's what I've been after wanting ever since I knew you."

The girl's hat was lying on the grass at her feet, and the rays of sunlight filtering through the over-arching boughs played lovingly about her sweet little face, with its half-shy, half mischievous eyes, and pretty red mouth.

George Gordon's arms were around her, tightening their hold, and yet she did not resist the electricity of his great, unselfish passion.

Something seemed to wake a faintly answering thrill in her heart, as if it were the heart of another Kit in a long forgotten world, who had loved and been beloved, with no barriers of circumstance between.

"Oh, why!" she cried; "why has this happened?"

"It's your own fault, for being yourself," he began wildly, then stopped as the sense of her words dawned on him, and unclasping his arms, he strove to put her from him, but she put both her little hands on his shoulders.

"George," she said, softly, "you may have your heart's desire."

Scarcely believing her, he caught her in his arms again and stooping, pressed his lips to hers.

Kit withdrew herself quickly, turning her hot, flushed face away. There was a silence for a moment—to the man it was as if he had tasted the supreme joy of heaven and the bitterness of hell during the silence, and then Kit said,

"And now, George, you had better get the horses."

Miss Kit's voice had the note of chilly dignity again, as she gave orders to her uncle's stockman. The mood was over, the reaction had set in.

Gordon walked over to the horses, and as he did so, Chris Lee came in sight.

He rode up at a quick trot to Miss Kit.

"So here you are," he said cheerfully, "safe and sound with George; the boss reckoned you were lost when I returned without you. That swamp nearly swamped me, Miss Kit; got into a deep hole, and my horse wouldn't swim, he rolled over instead, and got out without me. I was hours chasing him. Gordon can ride down and tell them you are safe, and I'll take you straight home. Gordon!"

"Yes, sir."

"Ride to the slip-rails and tell the boss that Miss Heron is all right. And he wants you to leave a message about the rations at Smith's. Don't forget to ask him."

"Yes, sir."

Gordon swung into the saddle, and rode slowly past; he half pulled up as he passed Miss Kit, but did not look at her as he said:

"Thank you, Miss Kit. I promise you that you'll never be sorry you was so good to me."

Kit flushed a little. "I kept my promise; see that you keep yours, George Gordon," she said.

Already the declining sun was sending level rays along the river flats, showing every stalk and leaf and slender star of the myriad buttercups distinctly. Already the shadows in the brigalow scrubs were deepening to purple. Looking back, George Gordon saw a girl's slender figure outlined a moment against the crimsoning west; then it disappeared, and George knew that his "day with Miss Kit" was over.

Dot, aged six (on the conclusion of song by celebrated tenor): "Papa, did that man make all that noise *on purpose?*"

An authoress says: "A kiss gives more pleasure than anything else in the world," and she ought to know. But a quibbling editor responds:

"That writer evidently never experienced the childish rapture of descending the stairs by sliding down the bannisters."

A chemist was called up at two o'clock the other morning by the ringing of his night bell. On opening the door, he found a damsel, who told him she was going to a picnic that morning, and was out of rouge. The impudent druggist turned her off with the assurance that he hadn't the stock to cover a cheek like hers.

Harry: "She has jilted me, and I know I shall die. The disappointment will kill me."

Aunt Hannah: "I know how disappointment affects one, Harry. But you'll get over it. I felt just as you do now when I sat that yaller hen on thirteen eggs, and only got just one poor chick out of the lot."

"Fire, fire, help!" screamed a lady from the drawing-room to the kitchen. Immediately the parlour-maid and the cook, followed by two defenders of the country and one policeman rushed into the room, where they found the mistress of the house quietly reclining on the sofa. "There, that will do," she said, "I only wanted to see how many followers were on the premises."

100,000 PRIZES,

Valued at £10,000,

ARE BEING GIVEN AWAY.

Full particulars appeared in last week's paper, and will appear in the next number. . . . .

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A Child of the Circus.

ABOVE the homely little inn which stood alone in the romantic valley in the midst of budding hedges and high firs the moon was slowly climbing.

In the upper storey a window was wide open, and a man's dark figure was distinctly outlined against the bright square of the window frame.

Wolfgang Hermes had been a late guest. He had disturbed the host in his night's rest, and had been obliged to leave his luggage in the traveller's room, where it was of no use to him.

The small oil-lamp which his host had placed for him on the table threw a dim light over the shabby contents of the humble attic room. He stepped back from the window, drew a chair to the table, and took out his pocket-book. He turned the leaves over and took from it a letter, which he slowly unfolded and read thus:

"MY DEAR SON,—Although I am accustomed to your extravagance, your last letter threw me into the greatest astonishment. Certainly you are quite correct when you write that since the death of your sister Gretchen I have cherished the wish to find a young girl who would fill her place in a measure; but that the child of a playing troupe will do this I cannot believe. Nevertheless, for love of you I will make the attempt and see whether this Wiarda is suited to family and domestic life. You may, therefore, bring me the foreign girl, dear Wolf, and in any case it will be a good thing to remove her from the life which she is leading.

"You must then in your turn promise me to listen afterwards to your mother's voice when she speaks of matters of vital interest to you. You may safely confide in me, for the eye of love is keen, and what love could be greater than that of a mother for her only son?"

Deeply thinking, Wolfgang folded the letter again. He had known that his mother would lay no obstacle in his way. Now he could treat seriously with the director of the troupe. How high would he put the price of Wiarda's freedom? Certainly she was the star, the centre of attraction of the whole. Well, the morning's dawn would bring the answer, and wearied out, he sought his night's rest at last.

The next day, with music and singing the company entered the quiet valley, and pitched their tent in the village street. The director squatted, with high-raised knees, on a three-legged stool, and a box, grey with dust and dirt, served as a ticket office.

"A bad business, Bob Macky," he said, with a glance at a clown stretched out in the straw behind him.

"But Wiarda," with a click of his tongue, "she always draws."

"Stupid fellow!" sounded a peevish voice from a corner of the half-dark room, and an impetuous young figure came forward from the shadow. A pair of great, shimmering dark eyes shone from the small, pale, southern face down on the speaker. "There!" she said, snatching up a bunch of straw from the ground with her small brown hands and throwing it at his head, "A little refreshment!"

"Thank you, thank you, mademoiselle!" he said with mocking courtesy. "The present is certainly princely. Ah, who is coming?"

With a nimble spring he was at the box, ready to pocket a possible instalment on his backstanding pay.

"Tickets—first-class, two shillings; second-class, one shilling; third-class, sixpence; no standing room!" rattled off the director.

"I only wish to speak to you," returned the gentleman addressed. "Let me enter for a moment."

"Without permission, entrance is strictly forbidden," declared the clown. "You must take a ticket."

The intruder threw him a silver piece, which disappeared with astonishing quickness into his trousers' pocket.

"Ah, Herr Hermes! That is indeed Herr Hermes, who will take me away with him!" exclaimed Wiarda, rejoiced as she ran to the newcomer and offered him her hand.

"Who talks of taking you away? I think I have something to say about that!" interrupted the director, raising himself to his full height and frowning.

"Certainly you have. But you live in very unpleasant circumstances," said Wolfgang, thus opening a way for his proposition.

"Sir, we are artists!" stormed the director, turning an angry red.

"Would you like to go with me, Wiarda?" asked Wolfgang, filled with that deep interest which from the first had drawn him to the peculiar child.

"Yes!" she exclaimed with shining eyes. "I would like to travel. I would like to see lands and cities, and to learn to understand all that is great and beautiful."

"Let us try, Herr Director, to see if we can agree on this matter over a flask of good wine."

The director was no hater of good things, and when he returned with Wolfgang a few hours later, the latter had gained permission, with the aid of a hundred marks, to take Wiarda away with him.

* * * * *

"My dear child, are you still asleep?" said Frau Hermes, a few days later, as, with irreproachable cap on her silvery hair, she looked in the pleasant guest chamber which she had assigned to Wiarda the night before for a sleeping-room. "Early to bed and early to rise, you know, and your coffee is getting entirely cold."

Wiarda blinked sleepily at the speaker.

"Bob Macky always brought me my coffee in bed," she complained, while she took an India shawl from her trunk and wrapped herself up in it.

Her wealth of dark hair fell loosely down. She twined some strings of pearls through it, and remained

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standing before the great pier glass, which occupied half of the side of the room, as one lost in a dream, sunk in admiration of her own beauty.

"You look charming, Wiarda," said Wolfgang as she entered the dining-room and gave him a joyous good-morning.

"I do not think it suitable to deck yourself in the daytime with such theatrical gear," chided Frau Hermes.

"I have nothing else," said the girl, shrugging her shoulders.

"Then you should bind up your hair and leave off the pearls," was the reply.

"She is yet only a child, mother."

Wolfgang sought to appease his mother, while Wiarda hastily loosened the pearls from her hair and threw them to the ground, where they rolled noisily round her.

"There!" she cried, pale with excitement. "There! But I have no need to braid my hair and wear fashionable clothes that pinch me and take away my breath. I am a player's child, and you will make nothing else than I am out of me!"

Such scenes occurred frequently, and Wiarda grew to be a strange, reserved girl, with a look of longing ever in the great, shimmering eyes.

Gradually her outward appearance greatly changed under the pressure of Frau Hermes' will. In the long, dark dresses which were always fastened up to the throat, she appeared to the least advantage, and the hair, tightly plaited and smoothly parted on top, took from her face that charm that had been peculiar to it.

So with Wolfgang, whose eyes were always so susceptible to beauty, gradually the first warmer feeling faded away and left room for only a brotherly interest, while in Wiarda, the naturally impulsive and affectionate nature being repulsed, created in her character an underlying bitterness, which was increased by the lack of return which Wolfgang made to her adoring fondness of him.

Little by little a state of war grew up between her and Frau Hermes. Wiarda could not succeed in conducting everything with that painful regularity which Frau Hermes, accustomed to the severest order, wished. She could not comprehend that the weal or woe of a household depended upon the correct computing of the milk bill or the re-weighing of the meat and butter. All that meant nothing to her, so long as the breakfast table was decorated with fresh flowers and the evening board with lights.

Thus had a struggle arisen which, though carried on in silence, embittered both women, and left the stamp of discontent, making it impossible for them to lead a happy family life.

Frau Hermes hoped to aid matters by enlarging her little circle. She had a young friend, Magdalen Mertens, who, since the death of her mother, was comparatively alone. Frau Hermes thought that the maidenly charm and genuine womanliness of the girl would work with favourable influence on Wiarda, while her loving mother's heart predicted, when she thought of Wolfgang, a happy future for him with pretty Magdalen.

"You are going to have company," said Wolfgang one day to Wiarda.

She turned from the window.

"Indeed! Who is coming?" she asked, fixing her weary eyes on his handsome, open face.

"Magdalen Mertens, a very charming young lady."

He laughed a little and stroked his moustache.

Her eyes darkened.

"When will she arrive?"

"To-day, I think. She is an orphan, a distant relative of my mother, and is said to be very pretty."

"Oh, I can guess! Light, smooth hair, chubby face!"

She slurred over the words.

"Why, Wiarda—"

The girl pressed her brow against the cold pane and began softly to weep.

"What is the matter with you? Are you ill?" he asked, and drew her toward him and stroked the dark hair.

She clung to him a moment, clasping him with both arms, then tore herself away and flew from the room.

Magdalen arrived the same evening. She was a dainty little blonde, and had indeed the smooth hair, parted back from a rosy Madonna face. She breathed an atmosphere of peace and cheerfulness, and seemed a creature made to love and be loved.

With quiet pleasure Frau Hermes noted the deep impression that this lovely girl made on Wolfgang, who joined more and more in the family reunions and visits, during which he had formerly remained in his room, studying, if not claimed by his widening practice.

Only Wiarda maintained towards their guest a repellent demeanour. She was a quiet but close observer of the events about her, and as the intercourse between Magdalen and Wolf grew more intimate, as Magdalen won the undivided love of mother and son, Wiarda grew more gloomy and reserved, while at times a dangerous light glittered in her eyes.

Her passionate nature revolted at the restraint of good manners in which her foster-mother had so carefully instructed her, and at last there came an unrestrained outbreak of her violent disposition.

"I cannot endure you! What do you want of me?" she said angrily to Magdalen one day when the unsuspecting girl entered her room. "Go away! I do not want to see you! Go! Do you not hear? I hate you more than I can say!"

"Why, Wiarda!" said Magdalen, startled, and the swift blood flew to her face.

"Go away!" cried Wiarda, beside herself. "I shall go mad if you stay!"

Alarmed, Magdalen flew from the room, and in much distress entered the neighbouring one. There she paced restlessly up and down, and finally seated herself by the piano. Her hands wandered over the keys in a soft prelude, and she forgot the insult she had received in the sweet melody of song. She had still cause to be happy.

I cared not for power nor jewels,
Nor for that which with money is bought,
I longed for a heart full of love,
And in you I have found what I sought.

Lightly and tenderly sounded the soft tones of the girlish voice; the heavy portière which separated the room from the others of the suite was drawn aside by a man's hand. Wolfgang entered and stood by her side.

"Was that intended for me, Magdalen?" he asked softly, and looked passionately down at the blushing face. Then he seized her hands and discovered that she was trembling. "Magdalen," he exclaimed, "will you marry me and be a doctor's wife, my dear companion all the days that are left to us?"

She leaned her golden head on his shoulder, and her lovely face was transfigured with the light of love.

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"Yes," she said softly, and he drew her into his arms and kissed her.

Frau Hermes was overjoyed.

"We will celebrate their betrothal becomingly," she said, and ordered champagne to be placed on the table at evening.

"What is the matter?" asked Wiarda, suspiciously, when she saw the festive preparations.

"Why, do you not know?" Frau Hermes asked in surprise. "Wolfgang and Magdalen are betrothed."

Wiarda reeled and caught at a chair for support.

"Indeed!" she said, and grew a shade paler. Then while a mist swam before her eyes, "I congratulate them," she added hastily.

"Thanks," returned Frau Hermes, coldly, as she settled her new cap before the mirror. "It can be made public now."

The evening passed happily, and Wiarda's lack of interest in the proceedings was noticed by no one but Magdalen, who was reminded of the scene in the morning.

It might have been midnight. Magdalen lay wrapped in sweet slumber, when it seemed to her that her light curtains were parted, and she looked into a pale, agitated face, framed by a sweep of long dark hair, in which bright glass pearls shone as precious stones in the moonlight, while a pair of great, feverishly-glittering eyes, mysterious in their dark depths, were riveted on her—Wiarda's eyes.

Magdalen screamed and the figure withdrew, while a small object fell with a clinking sound to the floor.

A moment Magdalen saw her standing there in the full moonshine with a ghastly pale face, and in a strange, glittering dress hung with golden links and chains, then vanish silently from the room.

Was it only a shadow—a dream? She threw herself restlessly on her couch. Presently she heard the house door close. She arose and hastened to the window. She opened it, and the soft night breeze entered.

Below, on the street, all was still, but by the dim light of the lanterns she saw a shadow flit along the houses.

"Wiarda!" she called. "Wiarda!"

The name was lost in the wind, and, shivering, Magdalen closed the window.

"What can be keeping Wiarda?" asked Frau Hermes the following morning.

"Perhaps I only dreamed," said Magdalen, "but it seemed to me last night that I saw her standing before my bed with floating hair and bright pearls in it and shining eyes—and she must have dropped this."

Thereupon she drew forth a small, keen dagger and laid it upon the table. Horror-stricken, they gazed at it.

"I was so frightened," continued Magdalen, "when I awoke, that I screamed, and she drew back and left the room. A little later I heard the click of the house door."

"Your guardian angel has preserved you!" exclaimed Wolfgang, and he bent and kissed her. "She has gone to her own," he added, "she belonged to the world of glitter and spangles, and it was folly to tear her from it."

CATHERINE HUBBS.

His Little Girl Wife.

A HEAVENLY night. From the blue-black sky peeped the countless stars. The crescent moon hung in the eastern horizon, illuminating the tops of the buildings of the great city that frosty December night. Fleecy white clouds scudded across the vast expanse overhead, now obscuring a bright constellation, anon hurrying on—on, to break in mists upon other shores.

A small crowd of loiterers hung round the stage door of the Variety Theatre after the performance. At brief intervals dark figures emerged from the door into the street.

Among the loiterers was a young man, whose clear-cut classic features wore an anxious expression. His dark eyes were peering steadily in the direction of the stage door. He had a hunted look in the dim light from the dirty lamp.

Suddenly there rang out on the night air three sharp reports. A body fell at the door. The small crowd was doubled, trebled. Murdered!—shot through the heart!—the manager of the renowned circus troupe.

A month later the young man was on his trial for wilful murder. It was a case of circumstantial evidence. A revolver, a nickel-plated revolver, was found in his possession that night, a month before. Three chambers were loaded, three unloaded; but the revolver had not been discharged.

At the rear of the gallery, from the commencement of the trial there peeped out the anxious face of a beautiful girl, with golden hair and blue eyes. Her face was of a deathly pallor. It was said she fainted away when the revolver was produced in court.

On the third day a piercing shriek rent the crowded court as the foreman of the jury pronounced the words "Not guilty." The trial had been stopped. A man had given himself up as the actual murderer. He told his story in sobs. It was a sad story. Investigation bore out the man's statement in every detail.

Two years before—no, it was more than two, for it was in the mellow tints of a lovely autumn—two young lovers were in low conversation at the same stage door before the performance.

"From here we leave for Paris," said the orphan girl to her lover.

"You are going away for a long time, darling?"

"No, I believe not; not for long, Cyril. You know I shall write to you. I shall tell you where I am in every letter."

He squeezed her tiny hand.

"Ah, yes!" he faltered. "You will not forget now?"

She shook her head of golden locks. The blue eyes looked silently into his, then their lips met.

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That night they parted, "but only for a time," Winnie said to herself. They would meet ere long, and he—he would be able to keep a wife then. She would be his wife, this beautiful child acrobat.

Yes, they wrote to each other. She told him of the great Continental cities. She spoke of the beautiful sunsets, and orange groves, of purple and snow-capped mountains, and the blue skies—so blue!—of black, frowning chasms, rushing torrents, and great buildings reaching to a giddy height against the sky; she told him of fine gentlemen who wanted to make love to her, in Paris, Berlin, Vienna, St. Petersburg, and all the places the troupe had visited—but she could never love them.

It was after many months he received the following, traced in her round, girlish hand:

"Our manager is very cruel. He does not give us sufficient food. He sometimes whips us with the lash to make us learn our tasks. Then we grow tired and weak. The other night I fell from the trapeze into the pit. All the people in the theatre stood up and cried out; but I wasn't hurt. I succeeded at last. The people clapped their hands, and shouted, 'Bravo, little one!' There's a beautiful girl in our troupe, with black hair and black eyes, and rosy cheeks. I think she is going to die. The manager has been, oh! so cruel to her for such a long time now. She coughs all day and all night long. She has become so thin. When she cannot do her task he whips her. I cried all night last night for her. I asked him to allow her to rest, and not take part in the performance. He would not listen to me. Poor Edith! she tries so hard to fight her dreadful cough. If I were a man I would shoot our manager. He smiles so kindly, and shakes hands with the people, but he is cruel to us. I am one of the stars now. With love and kisses. WINIFRED."

He prayed for her return; in vain he waited. Months passed—she, too, might be dead. Twelve months passed. By slow degrees he began to lose himself. The drink fiend overtook him; he lost his situation; he was on the verge of starvation. He rented a garret in the poor part of the city; then to eke out his wretched existence he took to writing little things for the papers.

"Winnie! Winnie!" he cried out often in the dead of night, hesitating between drink or work to drown thought. He could see her face again; he could hear her sweet voice, ere she left him. "Yes; for thee, for thee, I will!" he cried out.

A few months subsequently a story flashed upon the world like a meteor from the sky. The public clamoured on all sides for the anonymous author. He woke to find himself famous.

But he was not happy. She could not share his good fortune. All the fame of the world could not equal her love.

One day his attention was arrested by a startling poster in huge black letters on a yellow ground, thus:

"Return visit of the famous Bertini acrobatic troupe, after glorious successes in Paris, Berlin, Vienna, St. Petersburg, etc., etc. For six nights only. Extraordinary attractions, etc., etc., etc."

As he read his eyes seemed to become riveted to that poster. Then, after a while, he walked away in a reverie.

* * * * * *

"The best made to-day, sir," said the gunsmith. "Suicide?" elevating his eyebrows and smiling in an insinuating manner.

The other was examining a revolver, carefully inspecting the working parts. As he turned it about he could see his face in it. Shadows danced from it like a toy looking-glass.

He coolly shook his head, and, without exchanging many words, left the shop.

* * * * *

He lit a cigar, and, buttoning up his overcoat, stepped out into the frosty air. He walked steadily in the direction of the theatre. Nearing his destination, he stopped under a lamp to look at his watch. Yes, it was near the hour. He would beguile the time by walking about—close to that door.

It was a terrible time. Keen as was the air, great beads of perspiration fell from his face. He watched the forms that left the door, ever and anon fumbling beneath his coat. He listened to the monotonous tramp, tramp of his own footsteps Once, in a momentary fever of excitement, he brushed aside two or three from among the knot of loiterers, as a figure emerged from the door, fearful of missing his man.

A man's figure descended the few steps. Beneath the partially-buttoned coat could be seen a spangled breast on a flesh-coloured garment. Cyril produced his instrument of death.

"Great heaven, what is that?" he gasped.

One, two, three flashes, three loud reports, and the man with the spangled breast fell dead on his face at Cyril's feet!

That was how the murder was done.

* * * * *

"Thank heaven, not guilty!" said Winnie in a caressing tone. "And you believed me dead, Cyril?"

"Yes, darling. I thought you were not telling me all."

"I did suffer, Cyril. He stopped our writing home. He cut off all communication with friends or relatives."

The young author and his little girl-wife were sitting in the twilight by the fireside in their pretty home. Fantastic shadows danced on the walls from the fitful flames. Out beyond the window and the long garden were the purple hills and endless groves of oak and elm in deep perspective.

In his hand he held a sheet of paper. This is what was written on that paper:

"You were wrongly accused. Forgive me. He murdered my child, my only child—all that was dearest in the world to me, a lonely widower. Oh, how I had longed for her to be home again! But she came back to die. She was murdered, sir; murdered by him. How I remember her going away! Heaven bless her! And we were to be so happy when she came home. I have worked hard, living for her; living, as you would, in the fond hope of having her with me once more. Two loving notes she sent me. But one day a letter came in another handwriting, telling me my child was dying—dying, sir! I would not believe it. She had said nothing. But she wrote no more to me. I wrote again and again. Oh, what days of bitter anguish! What suspense I suffered—waiting, waiting for the truth I hoped to learn, which never came! But, by heaven, it came at last! She came, she and Death. So the Great Reaper took my Edith—my only child.

"You will forgive me, won't you, sir? Now I have to suffer—but not for murder. The jury reduced it to manslaughter. The judge said, as I in my heart have said, his was a greater crime than mine. Twelve months' imprisonment! I shall never look up again, sir; but I shall see my child once more. Farewell!"

GERALD DONALDSON.

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THE FIRM OF ARMITAGE AND BROWNE.

I HAD been called to the bar not quite a year, and was seated with my friend Frank Armitage in our chambers in the Temple. Frank had been called on the same day as myself, and we had agreed to make our professional start together.

To that end we had become joint possessors of a set of chambers at No. 99, Fig-tree Court, and of a boy named Blobbs, who was known as our 'clerk," though his tender years and seedy garments made the dignified appellation sound almost ironical. His style of dress was peculiar, and gave one the idea that he had several brothers of various sizes, and had borrowed an article of apparel from each—his boots belonging to the eldest, and his trousers to the youngest.

There were sundry other boys on our staircase, with whom Blobbs was constantly having little differences, and fighting them out upon the landing; indeed this, with occasional expeditions to the chemist's for commissariat purposes, formed the staple of his professional occupations.

When he first undertook his duties, we had started him with a pint bottle of ink, a ream of draft paper, and a gross of pens; and we had enjoined him to employ all his leisure time in copying precedents. He began with great vigour, and copied about a page and a half, in a large schoolboy hand, the first morning, but he never got any farther. The ream of paper dwindled somehow, and the ink disappeared to an extent which even the numerous little black devils, with which Blobbs had embellished his domain, failed to account for, until one morning I detected him in the act of blacking his boots with it, and polishing them with the pen-wiper.

Still, as boys go, Blobbs was not a very bad specimen; and as we really had no work for him to do, we were not disposed to be extremely angry with him for not doing it. Fortunately, Armitage and myself were both to a considerable extent independent of our profession, for, to all appearance, our profession was quite independent of us.

We had been called, as I have mentioned, very nearly a year, and neither of us had yet been favoured with a brief, nor did there appear to be any particular likelihood that we ever should.

We had a friend, Charlie Larcombe, who had recently been articled to a solicitor, and who had promised that when he was out of his articles (which would be in about four years), and had passed his examination (which might be forty), he would "give us a lift."

This rather vague prospect really appeared to be our only chance; but, with the natural sanguineness of youth, we still looked for briefs, though we had not the faintest notion where they were to come from. In truth, in the very early days of our professional career (when we had only been barristers for a week or two) we used to watch with anxious solicitude any person of legal aspect who was seen to cross the court in the direction of our staircase; but we found that the persons of legal aspect invariably stopped short at the chambers of Cocksure, Q.C., which were immediately below ours, and the approach of a stranger had now ceased to excite more than a casual interest. Our personal habits, too, had degenerated.

At the outset of our career we had unanimously agreed that everything of an unprofessional character in our belongings should be rigidly tabooed. In particular we had decided that our breakfast should always be over, and its remains cleared away, before nine a.m. and that the smoking should not on any account be permitted in the room destined for the reception of clients.

In accordance with these virtuous resolves, we were (or I rather should say we had been) always to be found by half-past nine, each seated in the rigidest of armchairs, wearing the blackest of frock coats and the stiffest of shirt collars, attentively perusing ponderous law books, and making copious notes with the assistance of a gigantic pewter inkstand, polished to a positively dazzling brightness.

But this halcyon state of affairs was too good to last. We had screwed up our virtuous resolves to too extreme a tension, and they had gradually sunk down again. Who was the first to give way is a moot point. My own idea is that all would have gone well had not Armitage insidiously suggested our allowing ourselves just one cigarette after breakfast; while he will have it that the thin end of the wedge was introduced by my surreptitiously reading an occasional French novel under cover of Coke on Littleton. However this may be, we had speedily fallen away from our original high standard.

Not having been troubled with that frantic rush of clients which we had originally expected, we had become much less particular in our habits. The large

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law-books were left unopened, the hour of breakfast had become gradually later and later, and short pipes and tweed jackets had become the order of the day until luncheon, and sometimes, I fear, even till dinner-time.

In our earlier days, we had made it a point of honour that one or other of us should always remain in chambers, so as to be ready for anything that might turn up; but now we made nothing of putting up the delusive notice: "Return in five minutes," and departing together for the rest of the day.

In order, however, to keep up the pleasant fiction that we still expected to have clients some day, we had made a bet. Each of us had backed himself for five pounds to get the first brief, with the proviso that (if ever the bet should be decided) the winner was to stand a dinner to the loser, in order to commemorate the event.

Imagine our condition, therefore, when, on the morning of my story, soon after ten, a heavy step was heard to ascend the staircase and pause at our door, and when Blobbs (who had been, according to his usual habit, settling a little difficulty with Cocksure's boy upon the landing) rushed in, and, in a hoarse whisper, said, frantic with excitement:

"A gentleman for Mister Browne! And he've got a bundle of papers."

I must say that Armitage's behaviour did him credit. My landing the first prize must naturally have been a disappointment to him, but in the most magnanimous way he exclaimed:

"Good for you, old man! Go in and win. I'll hook it into the next room, and leave the coast clear for you."

And he bolted accordingly into his bedroom. I would have given much to have been able to assume a more dignified attire and to straighten things generally before the entrance of my client, but it was out of the question. I had only just time to pitch the end of my cigar into the fire, open one of the big law books (upside down, as I afterwards discovered), and to compose my features into the most professional expression compatible with a flannel jacket and carpet slippers, when the visitor entered.

He was a short, puffy little man, middle-aged, and of a good-naturedly unintellectual cast of countenance. He wore a shabby white hat and greasy black gloves, and his trousers were shorter and his umbrella fatter than is generally considered desirable in those articles; but notwithstanding, there was an air of smug respectability about him, and the bundle of papers, tied with red tape, which he carried, had an eminently business-like appearance. He began:

"I must apologise for disturbing you at this hearly hour, Mr. Browne" (he was evidently not a high-class practitioner); "but the fact is, I have come to beg your assistance in a very urgent case."

I tried to look as if very urgent cases were matters of the most ordinary occurrence in my professional experience.

"Ah," I said, "quite so. Take a seat, Mr. ——"

"Ward, sir; Gibbins and Ward, of High Street, Bloomsbury. You have heard the name, I dare say. Gibbins is dead—has been dead some years, in fact; but we keep up the old name, you know."

I didn't know in the least. I had never to my knowledge heard of Gibbins and Ward, but it would not do to admit the fact. Not to know Gibbons and Ward would clearly be to argue myself unknown. I took my cue accordingly.

"Oh, yes; Gibbins and Ward, a most eminent firm! I am delighted to have the pleasure of making your acquaintance, Mr. Ward."

"You are very kind, sir. Well, sir, as I was saying, or rather as I was about to say, I have become connected with a case—a very peculiar case, indeed—a most peculiar case—and, hearing of you from my old friend Mr. Wiggins, I thought that, though I am a stranger to you myself, I might venture to call and ask you to assist me in it."

"Dear me," I thought, "whoever would have thought of old Wiggins (my hairdresser) sending me a client!" And, on the principle that one good turn deserves another, I mentally resolved to go and get my hair cut the very next day. I replied: "I shall be very happy, Mr. Ward. Have you the particulars in writing?"

"Well, not exactly," said Mr. Ward, depositing his bundle of papers in his hat. "I have a few rough memoranda; but I'll tell you in half-a-dozen words the state of the case. The party I represent is a Mrs. Podgers; and I think you'll agree with me that she has been very badly used. The fact is, she was the daughter of an old fellow named Glubb, in the oil and colour trade, a man reputed to be worth a mint of money. When she married Podgers, who was a pork butcher in a small way of business, Podgers naturally wanted to know what the old man would do for them. A little ready money would have been very acceptable; and as they knew that Susan (that's Mrs. Podgers) was the only daughter, and would come in for all the old man's money at his death, they didn't see why he shouldn't give 'em a little at once, on account like. But old Glubb wasn't to be had in that way.

"'No,' he says, 'if you marry Susan, when I die you'll have all I've got, which may be ten thousand, or it may be twenty; but I'm not a-going to undress before I go to bed, as the saying is!'

"So upon that, and quite relying that the old man would keep his word, Podgers goes and marries. They all knew the old man couldn't last very long, so on the strength of his expectations, Podgers puts in a new shop window and starts a pony-trap. Trade was bad, and Podgers found himself outrunning the constable a bit, but he did not mind, feeling sure it would be all right when the old man went off the books."

I began to see my way. Podgers had married on the strength of the old gentleman's promise, and the old gentleman had subsequently changed his mind. Here was an opportunity of pressing Mr. Ward with my acumen.

"Excuse my interrupting you one moment, Mr. Ward," and I rang the bell. Blobbs entered. "Blobbs, give me 'Chitty on Contracts,' and then go and ask Mr. Cocksure's clerk to oblige me with the loan of the sixth volume of 'Meeson and Welsby,' I think I can give you a case just in point, Mr. Ward."

Blobbs handed me "Chitty on Contracts," which, in point of fact, was on the mantelpiece immediately behind me, and departed to execute the remainder of my order. I referred to the index, murmuring audibly, "Consideration—good—valuable—marriage—page 18." Then turned to the passage and silently perused it with much attention. "Ah, yes, I thought so!"

Blobbs here returned with the borrowed volume, in which, with an air of deep reflection, I turned to an imaginary authority.

"No, that won't do. I had forgotten for the moment that that case was overruled by Jones v Robinson. Pray proceed, Mr. Ward."

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Mr. Ward had more than once attempted to continue his story, but with a gentle wave of the hand I had courteously yet firmly deprecated interruption. He resumed apologetically:

"I'm afraid I'm giving you a deal of trouble, Mr. Browne."

"Not at all, Mr. Ward, I assure you. I always like to make sure, from the outset, as to the broad principles applicable."

"Quite so, sir; very true. But I am afraid there is a little misunderstanding."

"I think not. I have followed you with great attention. A. marries B.'s daughter, C., on the faith of an undertaking by B. that he will, on his death, leave C. the whole of his property; B. (that's Glubb, you know) dies, and he doesn't leave the property to C. (that's Mrs. Podgers), but to somebody else. Isn't that your case?" And I leant back in my chair and eyed him with a deny-that-if-you-can sort of expression.

"Just exactly so, sir. If you'd been one of the family yourself you couldn't have got it more pat. They all went on as comfortably as possible till one Sunday the old gentleman dined with the Podgerses, and he found a caterpillar in the vegetables. He would have it they did it on purpose. He went home at once, tore up his will, and made another, leaving every penny of his money to the Asylum for Incurable Clearstarchers. The excitement brought on an apoplectic fit, and he died the very same night. Personalty sworn under £25,000; and Podgers all but in the *Gazette*."

I began to fear that the case would be a Chancery matter, and that my share in it would be limited to giving Mr. Ward an elaborate opinion to that effect. But it clearly would not do to make any suggestion of the kind at the present stage of the proceedings.

"Ah, just as I thought, you see." I tried to look as if I had anticipated every detail of the case, even to the caterpillar.

"Well, now, the question is—What evidence have we, first, of a distinct agreement on the part of B. (otherwise Glubb) to leave all his property to his daughter; and, secondly, that A. (otherwise Podgers) married on the faith of that promise? You hear what Chitty says: 'A valuable consideration is such as money, marriage, or the like which the law esteems an equivalent given for the grant, and is therefore founded on motives of justice.' That's the law; but how about the facts? Mere assertion won't do, you know; we must have evidence."

"Well, as to evidence, I'm afraid there isn't much in a legal sense. Mr. Cocksure has advised upon the case, and he says that we haven't any evidence; in fact, that we haven't a leg to stand upon."

It was flattering, and at the same time a little alarming, to be consulted in a case in which Mr. Cocksure had already expressed an adverse opinion. If Mr. Cocksure was timid, I had better be at least cautious.

"You will have uphill work before you I'm afraid; and I should recommend you, Mr. Ward, as a man of business (this is, of course, between ourselves), to see your way very clear as to your costs out of pocket. The Incurable Clearstarchers will fight hard, sir, you may depend on it."

"O, dear; yes, sir; no doubt they would. But we've quite made up our minds not to go to law about the matter. It would only be throwing good money after bad: leastways, it would if we had any to throw; but we haven't. Podgers ran away to America last Monday; and his poor wife and five young children are this moment living in a two-pair back in Camden Town, sustaining a miserable existence on the scanty remains of the stock-in-trade."

A horrible misgiving crossed my mind, and I shut up Chitty. "I thought—I mean to say I supposed—I really don't see quite, then, in what way I can be of service in the case, Mr. Ward."

"Well, you see, sir, Mr. Wiggins told me as you was an uncommon kind-hearted gentleman, so I made bold to call and ask if you wouldn't put down your name for a trifle for the widow and orphans—not that Mrs. P—— is precisely a widow, nor yet the children orphans, but rather worse, if anything, in my opinion, and another expected almost immediately, sir."

I was fairly caught. Not for worlds would I have let Mr. Ward know that I had been labouring under a misapprehension, and had been mentally welcoming him as my first client. On the other hand, after the extreme interest I had exhibited in the case, I could not do less than give him a handsome donation. Smiling amiably, but inwardly breathing the most awful imprecations against Wiggins (and very nearly vowing, on the spur of the moment, never to have my hair cut again as long as I lived), I expressed my extreme gratification at having the opportunity of contributing a sovereign to the necessities of the Podgers family.

Mr. Ward beamed with delight, and pressed on my acceptance his card, assuring me that "if I should at any time require anything in his line, it would be his most earnest endeavour"—these words, by-the-way, he apparently spelt with an h—"to give me satisfaction." He insisted on shaking hands at parting, and appeared to find considerable difficulty in tearing himself away. At last, however, he departed, leaving me still holding his card, whereon I read:

"Gibbins and Ward, Greengrocer, 195 High Street, Bloomsbury. Evening parties attended."

My one absorbing thought, as soon as I could think at all, was how on earth to conceal the facts from Armitage; what possible fiction to invent which should save my dignity from the exposure of the horrible truth.

What dreadful falsehood I might ultimately have given birth to I cannot say, for I was saved from the ordeal by hearing a burst—or, rather, a succession of bursts—of frantic laughter from the room to which Armitage had retired. I pushed the door, which yielded to my touch.

My worst fears were realised! He knew all. He was lying upon the bed, his feet considerably above his head, cramming a pocket-handkerchief into his mouth, and every now and then breaking out afresh into a peal of maniac laughter.

"Well, Browne, old boy, I hope you've given the new client a good sound legal opinion. Oh, dear, my poor sides. Where shall we have the dinner, eh, old man?"

"Come, Frank," I said, addressing him more in sorrow than in anger, "don't add insult to injury. You've had the door ajar, you scoundrel, so I need not tell you any particulars. But, at any rate, promise me to keep the secret."

"That I'll be hanged if I do, old boy; the joke is a great deal too good to keep to myself. How about 'Chitty on Contracts' and of 'Meeson and Welsby?' Oh, you old imposter! I'll be hanged if I don't tell the story to every fellow I meet."

So, for fear that the facts should be misrepresented—I hate misrepresentation—I determined to tell it myself.

Harry London.

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. . . RESULT OF THE . . .

£1,000 BIRTHS AND DEATHS COMPETITION.

TWO WINNERS GET £500 EACH.

THE Registrar-General's returns for the week ending April 22nd, 1899, state the number of births during that week in the thirty-three large towns in England and Wales as **7,297**, and deaths **3,993**.

Two competitors gave a correct forecast of both totals. The £1,000 has, therefore, been divided between them, according to the conditions of the competition, and a cheque for £500 has been forwarded to each person. Their names and addresses are:

MR. JOHN R. LLOYD,
13 Saxony Road,
Kensington,
and Liverpool.

MR. J. G. MALE,
4a Rose Mount,
Oxton,
Birkenhead.

The witnesses who signed Mr. Lloyd's coupon are:

THOMAS LLOYD, 43 Farnworth Street, Liverpool.
WILLIAM ORTON, 5 Saxony Road, Liverpool.
LOUIE ORTON, " " "
ANNIE ORTON, " " "
ALFRED ORTON, " " "

The copy of *Home Notes* from which the winning coupon was taken was purchased from

T. CORLETT, 82 Crown Street, Liverpool.

Mr. Male's coupon was signed by:

GEORGE MALE, Fairclough Lane, Oxton, Birkenhead.
RICHARD GILLIES, 4 Fountain Street, Tranmere, Birkenhead.
CHARLES H. JONES, 18 Cardigan Street, Birkenhead,
HENRY SALE, 10 Larch Road, Birkenhead.
EDWARD DELF, 28 Fountain Street, Tranmere, Birkenhead.

The newsagent who sold *Short Stories* containing the winning coupon is

Mrs. TYSON, Rose Mount, Oxton, Birkenhead.

To each of the witnesses we have sent a cheque for £5, and to each of the newsagents a cheque for £12 10s., in accordance with the original announcement.

It will no doubt be interesting to competitors to know that one person gave a correct forecast of the deaths total, and was only one unit out in the births.

Eight competitors were one out in each total; three competitors were correct in one total, and two out in the other total; whilst an enormous number succeeded in giving one correct total in either case.

Immediately the result of the competition was known we forwarded the two cheques for £500 each to the winners, and have received their receipts for the money. We are, therefore, in a position to publish these below:

13 Saxony Road,
Kensington,
Liverpool.
May 9, 1899.

Editor, *Pearson's Weekly*.

DEAR SIR,—Your letter to hand this morning inclosing cheque for £500, for which I beg to thank you most heartily. At the same time I must express my appreciation for the prompt manner in which you have conducted this matter. I may say that it has come to me at a time when I shall feel the benefit of it. I am afraid I cannot find words to express fully my feelings at this moment, but in conclusion I must once more thank you for my good fortune.

Believe me,
Yours very faithfully,
JOHN R. LLOYD.

Received from the proprietors of *Pearson's Weekly*, *Home Notes*, and *Short Stories*, the sum of £500 (five hundred pounds), being one-half of the total prize of £1,000 offered in the recent Births and Deaths Competition.

(Signed) JOHN R. LLOYD,
13 Saxony Road,
Liverpool.
9th May, 1899.

4A Rose Mount, Oxton, 9th May, 1899.

Messrs. C. Arthur Pearson Limited.

GENTLEMEN,—Your favour of 8th inst. duly received, and I can assure you that I am most agreeably surprised. It gives me great pleasure to inclose receipt, and also to thank you for your kind congratulations.

I very much admire the business way you have carried out the competition, and I may add that I will do all in my power to forward the interest of your publications.

I am, Gentlemen,
Yours very sincerely,
J. G. MALE.

Received from the proprietors of *Pearson's Weekly*, *Home Notes*, and *Short Stories* the sum of Five Hundred Pounds (£500), being one-half of the total prize of £1,000 offered in the recent Births and Deaths Competition.

(Signed) J. G. MALE,
4a Rose Mount,
Oxton,
Birkenhead.
9th May, 1899.

CONSOLATION PRIZES.

To each of the competitors who were only a figure or two out, and had the hard luck to miss a portion of the grand distribution, we have forwarded a cheque as a consolation prize, though we are not liable to do so in accordance with the announcements of the competition. Their names and addresses are:

Emily Rither, Grove Lodge, Sawbridgeworth, Herts; George Clews, 3 The Avenue, Herne Bay; Arthur Wooler, 21 Joseph Street, Shipley, Yorks; Thos. Philips, 6 High Street, Dorking; Horatio T. Davis, 147 Main Street, Bulwell, Nottingham; Benjamin Parker, Broadlands, Oulton Road, Lowestoft; Jonathan Mason, 60 Healy Wood Road, Burnley; J. Webb, 13 Clarendon Street, Hull; Thomas Dick, 10 Low Barholm, Kilbarchan, N. B.; L. Crawley, Frankfort House, Stanstead Road, Forest Hill, S.E.; Ernest A. Jewell, 2 Bedford Place, Plymouth; James Hamilton, 50 Great Hamilton Street, Glasgow.

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One Thousand Pounds for You

£100 FOR A NEWSAGENT OR BOOKSTALL CLERK.
£5 FOR EACH OF THE BOOKSTALL BOYS.

TO win this substantial sum of money, all you have to do is to fill up the coupon below, giving in the proper place the number of births and the number of deaths which will occur in the thirty-three great towns in England and Wales for the week ending July 1st, 1899.

Then write down your name and address, and ask the newsagent or bookstall clerk from whom you obtained this copy of "S.S." to insert his name and address in the space provided. Although such a course is obviously to his advantage, it is not compulsory for the coupon to bear his signature.

Newsagents and bookstall clerks may sign any number of coupons.

To the person whose attempt is correct we will pay the sum of **£1,000.**

To the newsagent or bookstall clerk whose name appears on the winning coupon we will pay the sum of **£100,** and **£5** to each of the boys attached to the bookstall from which the paper was bought.

If no competitor estimates the correct number of births and deaths, the £1,000 will be awarded to the individual whose forecast is most nearly correct.

In the event of two or more persons being correct, the £1,000 will be divided amongst them. This condition applies also to the £100 for the newsagent or bookstall clerk, and the £5 for bookstall boys.

One competitor may send in any number of attempts.

It must be clearly understood that all persons who enter for this competition must abide by the decision of the Editor in any question that may arise in connection with the competition.

As a guide to your estimate we give below the number of Births and Deaths which have taken place in the thirty-three largest towns in England and Wales for the corresponding period during the past three years.

The figures published by the Registrar-General will be taken as correct. On December 2nd, 1898, a competition similar to this was declared legal by the Appeal Court.

Registered during the Week Ending July 4th, 1896.		Registered during the Week Ending July 3rd, 1897.		Registered during the Week Ending July 2nd, 1898.	
Births.	Deaths.	Births.	Deaths.	Births.	Deaths.
6,872	3,691	7,115	3,106	6,575	3,203

All attempts to be addressed to the Editor, Short Stories, Henrietta Street, London, W.C., and the envelope to be marked in the left-hand corner with the word: "Births."

This Competition closes on Wednesday, June 28th.

S. S.

My estimate is - { *Births* ..... / *Deaths* ..... } *Write in large Figures.*

Name .....

Address .....

*Newsagent or Bookstall Clerk** .....

.....

* If a bookstall clerk, the name of the station will be sufficient.

THIS PRIZE IS IN CONJUNCTION WITH "PEARSON'S WEEKLY," "HOME NOTES," "SUNDAY READER," AND "PASTIMES."

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THE PANG OF DEATH.

THE model was tired, for the pose was a most fatiguing one. But this was the last hour of the last day, and he had had double pay throughout the engagement. He was a tall, athletic fellow with a handsome, sensuous face now somewhat wan and refined from fatigue, for he was bound nude to one of the wooden posts supporting the roof—his ankles crossed and tied with cords of twisted grass, his arms, slightly bent, uplifted on either side of his head the wrist secured with strong wisps.

Arrows and darts were thrust into the wood about his head, neck and trunk, and a pile of brushwood was disposed around his lower limbs; for the dark, slight young man who was painting rapidly but surely at the canvas on the rough-hewn easel, had employed him to pose as a victim of Indian torture.

The scantily furnished cottage was situated in an isolated and picturesque dell on a bank of the Thames, some distance from Reading, and the artist, having found it entirely to his mind, had purchased it at a very reasonable rate from the late owner, who had reasons for departing to a region even more remote at as early a date as possible.

Kennedy, as the artist was called, had sought a long time for a model to his mind, however; but fortune had thrown in his way this man, an Italian whom he had unearthed in London and persuaded to visit the cottage daily—the persuasion having taken the form of double fees, all expenses and unlimited drink.

The picture was practically finished, save that the face was curiously expressionless and incomplete, although the likeness was perfect.

"So we part to-day, Carlo," said Kennedy. "I suppose you will be glad to find an easier job?"

The Italian smiled deprecatingly, but did not answer.

"Going back to your own country, eh, Carlo?" continued Kennedy. "Got a dark-eyed, olive-cheeked signora waiting for you. I'll be bound."

The Italian leered like a satyr, but replied: "Signor, no."

"Let's see, you're from Florence, I think you said; how long is it since you left?"

"Signor, eleven years."

"So long? Were you ever at Siena?"

"Signor, no," replied the Italian, with a quick, apprehensive look.

"Indeed? Well, perhaps you have heard of a love tragedy which occurred there about eleven years ago. A friend of mine was mixed up in it, but the assassin was never discovered. My friend's name was Chester. He was a fair-haired, fair-bearded Englishman travelling in Tuscany, and was happy enough to win the love of a beautiful girl named Teresa Peri. But she had a suitor among her own people, one Fileppo Currini, a handsome fellow, I believe, but evil and dissolute beyond redemption. The girl disliked him and spurned his every advance with loathing. Did you speak, Carlo?"

"Signor, no; I sigh—the day is long."

"Ah, well, you will soon be freed from your bonds, my Carlo. But to continue; Fileppo became madly jealous of this fair Englishman, whom he had heard of but never seen, and he surprised Teresa on her way to the trysting place to plead with her again, or threaten, perhaps. Anyhow, he overtook her before she met her lover, and, meeting with repulse and disdain doubtless, thrust his stiletto through her slender throat and fled like the cur he was, not daring to wait for the Englishman, who arrived to find his sweetheart in the death pang. The assassin fled to the mountains bordering the Maremma, it was said. Broken-hearted, the Englishman left the neighbourhood to search for the murderer, folks believed, and wandered the world over for years, carrying with him one souvenir of the cowardly crime—the deadly stiletto, which the criminal in his haste had not plucked from the wound. Look at it, Carlo."

He took from his pocket the weapon of which he spoke and advanced to the bound man, swinging it lightly in his hand. Great beads of perspiration rolled down the Italian's face, his eyes became awfully prominent and his lips twitched convulsively as he stammered, "Signor, the cord cuts."

"I am sorry to say that you must endure it for a few more minutes, Carlo—I beg your pardon, Fileppo. Now look steadily and know me at the last, for I am the Englishman, shaven and dyed to track you secretly and surely, so that you may die the death of the beautiful girl you slew—die with your own stiletto through your throat, while I paint your last agony, so that I may have it ever before my eyes."

The wretched creature whom he addressed struggled with the bonds until the cords incised the flesh, while he pleaded piteously for mercy in a jargon of tongues to which the other turned a deaf ear.

"My plans are well arranged, Fileppo," continued the artist mockingly. "I shall cut the canvas across, and take it away in that light case, so as to escape remark; it can be pieced again, my friend. The other furniture, easel, chairs and so on, will help to make up your funeral pyre. I don't think a little smoke will be noticed in this neighbourhood; if it is, I shall be far away—and you, too. Now for the death pang. Fileppo! Die remembering the murdered Teresa and her avenger. Die, you dog!"

He thrust the stiletto through the wretch's throat with the last word, strode back to the easel and painted the dying man's agonies with feverish rapidity but wonderful skill. The last choking breath left the throat, and the eyelids dropped over the glazing eyes as the finishing touch was put to the face now marvellously and horribly expressive in its ghastly realism.

"Got it!" said the artist, with a loud mirthless laugh and the light of madness now bright in his eyes Then he slit the canvas and frame across, placed the halves in the case, carefully retaining them apart with little clamps to prevent rubbing.

Next he broke the easel and chairs and cast them piece by piece upon the brushwood, lighted a match and set the pile alight. With another mirthless laugh he picked up the case containing the canvas, and, with a look of maniacal hate at the corpse, passed without, locked the door and withdrew the key.

Approaching the river, he flung the key far into the water, and turning again, made his way along a by-path, bearing with him into the unknown future the terrible picture of the death pang.

VICTOR NELSON.

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WAS IT MADNESS?

"My dear, if you will keep the children quiet I will try to take a nap before I go to the bank. My head aches cruelly. Wake me in half an hour."

It was a costly house in which Mr. Steadman, the great banker, lived, and it was in the most luxurious of easy chairs in his handsome library that he now sought repose. A loving and sympathetic wife adjusted the curtains to soften the light for the suffering man, and then, with her firm, soft hands she tenderly pressed and stroked his throbbing temples. Dwelling in an atmosphere of unbounded love, surrounded with every comfort that wealth could supply, he gradually lost all consciousness in profoundest slumber.

* * * * *

Horrible visions, so unreal and yet so vivid, flit through Charles Steadman's brain. Hard, stern faces are about him; restraining walls, and iron pallet!

At times a spirit of rage comes over him—a blind, unreasoning, overwhelming rage. It fills his veins with running fire. He feels a mighty strength through every nerve and fibre of his being and longs to grapple the throats of the bright-eyed demons who stare at him through the grated door of his imprisoning cell.

Hands reach out and clutch him, and when he fiercely struggles to be free they thrust him into a padded cage, scarce larger than a coffin, in which he cannot stand—he cannot rise—like a curtain of death it enshrouds him. Choking, suffocated, he dashes his fists, his feet, his head against the yielding sides; then comes oblivion, now complete, now partial, through which his suffering consciousness is charged with constant horror, and through which vibrate piercing, inhuman cries and awful laughter!

At times a softer mood comes over him. He calls for wife and children; to his eager inquiries for those he loves, false hypocritical answers are returned. But the dear ones never come, never come! Ah, now, happy relief, at length he awakens. What a frightful dream!

"Mary," he cries; "Mary."

But there is no answering touch, no answering voice!

Is he not then awake? Surely he is. His pulse beats calmly; his eyes are open; he feels that he has his full understanding.

Yet this is not his chair! Those walls, that window, they are not in his house. The floor is hard beneath his feet. Where are the thick rugs, the decorated walls, the rich draperies of his library? And, above all, where are the gentle hands and voice of Mary?

"Upon my word, doctor, this is amazing! I believe he is himself. Look at his eyes."

"Incredible! He is an incurable!"

"But look at the expression of his eyes! I tell you, this man is sane."

"Of course I am sane," says Steadman, "and what do you mean by this talk? Why am I not at home? And how do I come here?"

Now he sees that he is in a small room, sitting in an iron chair, which is fastened to the floor.

Startled, his eyes eagerly take in his surroundings—cold, grey walls—a little window protected by iron bars—a door with iron grating—a narrow iron bed covered with a neat, white counterpane; all so strange, and yet so strangely, strangely familiar!

A quiet, elderly man, dressed in a long black frock coat, stands before him, and by that man's side is another who stoops and peers intently into Steadman's puzzled, frightened face.

"What does this mean, gentlemen? What crime have I committed in my sleep that I am in prison? What will my wife think?" And he endeavours to rise from his chair.

"I am very glad, Mr. Steadman," says the man in black, placing a restraining hand upon his shoulder, "to hear you ask these questions. You have been very ill, but now you shall go home. Your wife will be a happy woman to hear of your recovery."

"But, doctor, if you are a doctor, why should I have been removed from home if I were ill? Surely home is the best place for a sick man, and my wife is the best of nurses. This is an outrage, and I'll teach you scoundrels that such things cannot be done with impunity."

He feels that old mad fury coming upon him. He dashes aside the doctor's hand, springs to his feet, and hurls himself at the iron-grated door. In an instant four hands seize him, well he remembers that hated touch—there comes the sound of hurrying feet, the door is opened, and in rush two attendants. Despite his frantic efforts, handcuffs are snapped upon his wrists, and brawny arms hold him panting and struggling down upon the iron cot. Oh, what does this mean? Those fearful visions, those dreams of mad struggles, of stern faces, of resistless coercion, of prison surroundings, flash through his mind. Were those dreams? Surely this is reality. And if this is reality were not those things real? Is he mad? Yet not now, if then; for lying there helpless as a child in the grasp of those terrible men his reason assures him that he no longer dreams.

"Doctor," he says pleadingly, "release me. I will be calm. I will injure no one. Surely you do not wish to cause me unnecessary suffering."

"Release him," said the doctor, "and leave the room."

They do so and he rises to his feet.

"Doctor, however things have been I am well now. I wish to go home. Will you permit me to do so? If you will, I will pardon all that's past. Only let me go to my wife."

"You shall," returned the doctor, "immediately. Be calm and patient and I will procure a conveyance as quickly as I can and you shall be with your wife within an hour."

The doctor leaves the cell, but fastens the door behind him, and Steadman faint and sick, sinks back into the iron chair and seeks to collect his thoughts.

It was but an hour ago that the sound of children's voices was stilled that he might sleep away his headache in the library at home. He can hear the echo of his wife's gentle "hush," causing his little Edith and his little Ned to stop their noisy play. He can feel the dear wife's breath and the slow stroke upon his forehead which carried him into dreamland. But what then? Nothing.

Is this dreamland? No, it is too frightfully real. He can hear—and see—and think—and remember. How clearly he can recall every incident of this eventful day! He had not been well for some time. His wife had been very anxious about him. Yielding to her persuasion, he had that morning consulted his family

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physician concerning himself. He can remember every word of the good man's advice,

"Too much worry; too much application to business; nervous breakdown threatened; must leave work and get away."

And he had answered:

"How could he, the manager and principal stockholder of a great bank and a director and official in a host of business enterprises which demanded his personal supervision? He was rich, yet there were liabilities which he alone knew how to turn from disaster into great profits. He could not stop, he must work a while longer—just a little while, and then he would take his wife and children abroad and have a happy year and regain his former health and vigour."

But the doctor has shaken his head and said:

"Mr. Steadman, you are in a serious condition, more serious than I would care to mention did I not know that, unless you are reasonably alarmed, you will not follow my directions."

And he had promised to think it over and had gone home to luncheon and his hour's rest in the peace and quiet of that dear abode.

* * * * *

But here comes the doctor and he will soon be with Mary and the children again and know all; for she will tell him why he was carried, in his sleep, to this dreadful place. It was no lack of love which sent him there—he knows that well, if it was done with her consent.

The cab stops in a part of the city where Steadman has never been before, in front of a plain, unpretending house. The cabman opens the door and the doctor alights.

"Oh! doctor, I beg of you not to spend time to make a call. Get me home! Get me home!"

"Come, Mr. Steadman, you will find her here."

"Find my wife here? Impossible! This is not my house. Driver, take me to Park Place. If you must stop, doctor, I will go on. You can follow at your leisure. Do you hear me, driver? Move on and don't spare your horses."

"But, Mr. Steadman, I tell you your wife is in this house. I will explain later."

Steadman springs from the carriage and hurries up the steps to the house. The doctor can hardly keep pace with him. He rings the bell, and to the maid says:

"Is Mrs. Steadman here? Say her husband wishes to see her."

There are running footsteps in the upper hall—a familiar form glides down the stairway, a moment's hesitation, a glad cry, and he is clasped in his dear wife's loving arms. She leads him into the little sitting-room, makes him sit down, and then caresses and comforts him as does a mother the child who was lost and is found again.

His eyes overflow with tears at this great tenderness—but what is this? the light maybe, perhaps the tears. It cannot be; but yes, the bright, brown hair is thickly streaked with grey!

"Oh, Mary!" he cries, "tell me, darling, why are you here? Why are we not at home with the children? And tell me, dearest, how came those grey hairs in your young head to-day? And now that I look at you, you are not the same. It is Mary, but you look older. Has my illness hurt you so, my poor little girl?"

And then he burst into sobs; but restrains his grief, after a time, as he thinks that at least he is well now, and come back to help and comfort her when it might have been so different.

"Come, dearest, a cab is at the door. You can excuse yourself here, and we will go home together. I will spend the afternoon with you and the children, and we will forget this horrible day. And, Mary, I'll fix things at the bank to-morrow. I'll take the doctor's advice, and we will all go to the seaside for as long a holiday as you can enjoy."

Then the poor little woman and the kind old doctor gradually tell Charles Steadman the whole sad truth. It is ten years since he fell asleep in the old home at Park Place. When he awoke he was another man. They touched lightly on the need of restraint in the "hospital." With the loss of his supervision, and perhaps through fraud and trickery, his great fortune had melted away, and his delicately nurtured wife had been obliged to give up her home and seek employment for the support of the family. He is scarcely given to understand that this included the support of himself at the private "hospital"; yet he feels it, oh, how keenly!

She had established and successfully maintained a school for children, and this is the school building and the children are now in the school room upstairs awaiting the return of their teacher.

Then comes the cruellest blow of all—for it must come. The man is mad in his demand for little Ned and Edith, now grown large and handsome, he is sure. He is made to know—it is broken to him gently—that Teddie and Edith have been dead many years.

He bows his head in grief too deep to find expression—a dry-eyed, burning, awful grief.

He is penniless. The best years of his life have been passed in a madhouse; he has come forth a broken, shattered man who can only be a burden to this little frail, care-worn woman; he can scarcely hope to lessen her toil, to witness which will be intolerable. For ten long years his own dear Mary—bitter to contemplate!—has laboured in desolation of spirit to support in the asylum her insane husband who could not repay her womanly devotion with one word of love, with one look of gratitude; who in his insanity, was blind to her patient face, deaf to her appealing voice. And with it all, Edith and Teddie are gone. He can never touch them, see them, or hear them again.

"Oh, Heaven, it cannot be!" breaks despairingly from his trembling lips.

He feels again that velvety touch of gentle fingers, soothing, oh, so soothing! on brow and eyes. He opens his eyes beneath those magic fingers—oh! Happy, joyous transformation! The stiff, wooden chair becomes soft and easy to his aching frame. The wall recedes, then stand dark and beautiful in familiar form; the rows of books in shelf on shelf, the draperies, the furniture; oh! this is home again.

And now—a heavenly music to his hungry ears—that murmur of children's voices from the room above takes on the tones of little Ned, of lovely Edith—blissful sound! And all the time he feels the rhythmical stroke of the tender hands of his sweet wife Mary. Looking upward, he sees starry eyes gazing down in to his, and the dear face is young and free from care, and the beautiful hair is all a rich, dark, glossy brown.

* * * * *

Was this returning madness benignly sent by Providence to cloak a hopeless misery in robes of seeming happiness?

Or was it all a dream and this the blessed awakening?

J. Ridgard.

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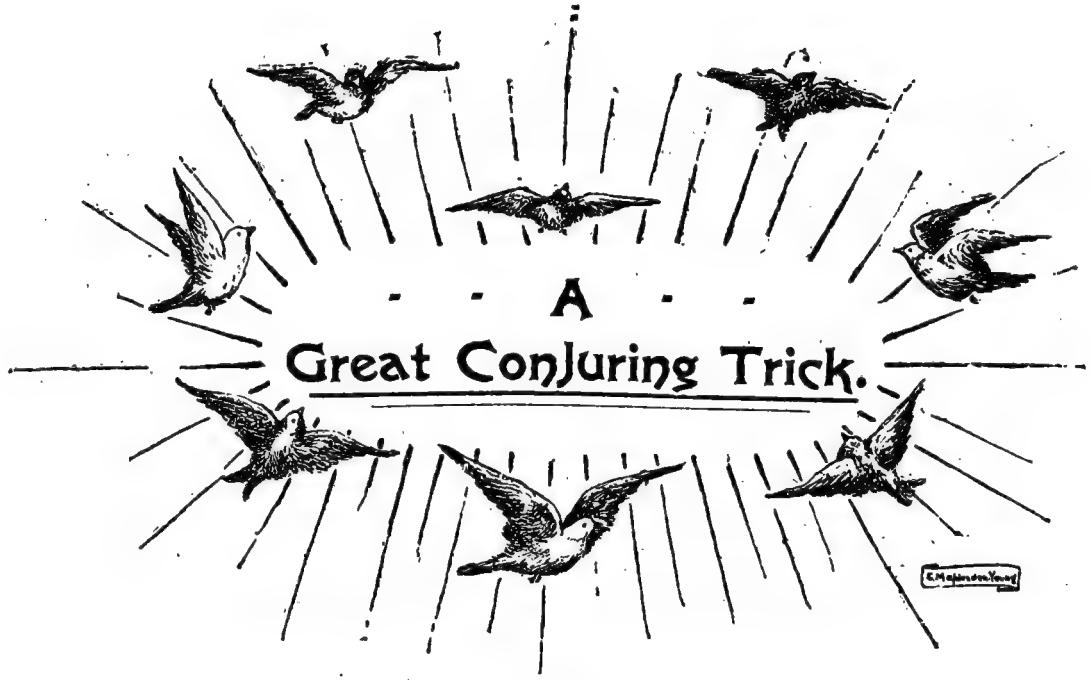

A Great Conjuring Trick.

THE eventful evening arrived at last. All day long I was in a perfect fever of excitement, thinking how I could act the part of host and provide the guests with sufficient amusement. Neville met me early on the day, and coolly informed me that he was going to bring a French marquis, whom he accidentally picked up at the club the preceding night.

"A marquis!" I exclaimed. "What in the name of all that's wonderful will we do with him?"

"Never mind," answered Neville gaily, "he is a jolly dog, and won't be particular. He heard that you possess good cigars and champagne, so he is going to grace your festive board with his presence."

"Very considerate of him, indeed," I drily rejoined. "I wonder will his presence at my festive board compensate me for the amount of cigars and champagne he is likely to consume."

"Come, now, don't be getting stingy," laughed Neville, as he glanced at his watch, "you have fallen in for a big rent-roll, and should enjoy it. You shall see me drop in with Monsieur Crapaud at eight. Until then, adieu."

"A marquis," I muttered as I hurried along. "I wonder what my deceased uncle would say if he accidentally heard, in that bourne from which no traveller returns, that my first step on getting the estate was to give a champagne supper to my student friends. By George, if Neville brings that Frenchman, as he surely will, the party will number thirteen—an unlucky number. I must see if I cannot get another. There's Burke, I would invite him only I have invited Desmond, and one Irishman is sufficient among a party whose political discussions generally end by one gentleman playfully flinging the decanter at another's head by way of emphasis. However, I will see before the time arrives."

By this time I arrived at my lodgings, or, as my friends more commonly term them, my "diggings," and found the servant (who performed the duties of cook, housemaid, hall porter, etc., in their rotation) in a heated discussion with a fair-haired, squat little gentleman, evidently a foreigner, judging by his gestures and broken English, both of which appeared unintelligible to the girl.

As I heard him mention Mons. Markham, I immediately introduced myself as that important personage, and requested the little man to kindly inform me of his wishes. He appeared delighted to have met me so fortunately, and smilingly handed me his card and a letter.

The card was that of Monsieur Lafette, and as I tore open the letter I glanced sharply at the stranger, who was employed in surveying the people who passed with a most sleepy air, which contrasted strangely with his animated conduct when I appeared on the scene.

The letter was from my younger brother Henry, who was the guest of an English family spending their winter on the Continent, and merely stated that the bearer, Mons. Lafette, was over in England on a pleasure trip, and as he was a total stranger to that country, he recommended him to my care, for, he added, "I am deeply indebted to him, and would like you to treat him well."

I immediately invited him to avail himself of the hospitality of my rooms, and remarked, "I am very glad you have arrived in time, monsieur, as I have invited a number of my bachelor friends to supper, and I am sure you will prove a valuable acquisition to our number, all the more so as you will fill a vacant place."

"I thank you," said he in his broken English. "I am very glad to fall into such hands, as I wish to see a little English society before I return to Paris, and I now see that your brother has not misinformed me when he said, 'You will always find Bob with some agreeable exploit on hand.'"

Meanwhile we were making ourselves comfortable

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before a bright fire, and I rang for refreshments, as monsieur said he felt fatigued after his long journey.

"May I ask you," said he, meanwhile refreshing the inner man, "how many nationalities do you intend having present this evening? No Germans, I hope, as I detest them."

"Well," I answered, smiling. "I rank nothing German among our acquaintances except, perhaps, some light wines, on which you can revenge yourself at your convenience. Of my friends, some are Irish, some Scotch, the majority English, and I think I shall have a countryman of yours present."

"Ah!" said he, carelessly, "who is he?"

"A sprig of nobility," I replied. "His name, if I remember aright, is the Marquis la René."

My little friend started, and looked at the clock, then jumped up and rang the bell with the air of one who had lived in the house for years.

"Pardon me," said he with a smile. "I quite forgot about dressing; it is now six o'clock, and by the time my luggage arrives I won't have much time to prepare for your friends."

He instructed the servant to send for the luggage, which soon arrived, and we both adjourned to make ourselves presentable.

I was astonished when I came down to find him in conversation with Desmond, who was evidently greatly amused with him, to judge from his frequent bursts of laughter.

Lafette turned round as I entered, and said:

"I was taking your place, Monsieur Markham, in your absence, but I am afraid I would prove but a poor substitute."

I replied that he was evidently amusing Desmond, who gave me a droll smile, which meant we will have some fun with him to-night.

Meanwhile the other fellows came dropping in, and were introduced with great solemnity to Mons. Lafette by Desmond, who performed the ceremony with the air of an undertaker.

Eight o'clock at last drew near, and as the clock chimed the hour we heard Neville laugh in the hall, and in a few seconds he appeared, accompanied by a powerfully-built, soldier-like man, whom he introduced all round as his friend the Marquis la René.

We all sat down, I occupying the seat of honour at the head of the table, with the marquis on my right, and Mons. Lafette on my left.

The conversation between these two worthies became most animated. The turf, the clubs, Paris, the fair women, Alsace and Lorraine, were all touched upon and criticised, and I was congratulating myself that we were going to have a regular good night. As the time flew swiftly on, speeches were delivered, in which I appeared, painted in the most glowing colours, doubtless conjured up with copious libations of Mumm's best. Toasts, recitations, and songs followed, and in the choruses of the latter the two Frenchmen lustily joined.

I noticed that Lafette was most temperate, and drank in very small quantities, and I once saw him empty his glass beneath the table.

Then Neville, who was an amateur conjuror, proposed to show some tricks. He placed money in a hat, caused it to disappear, and then found it in some of the company's pockets. He once searched the marquis for half-a-crown, and in so doing exposed an inside pocket, out of which peeped the butt of a revolver.

Neville did not appear to notice it, but Lafette gave me a meaning smile, which I afterwards understood.

Mons. Lafette then proposed a trick, which he said he once saw performed—viz., "He required the strongest man in the room to allow his hands to be tied behind his back, and to retire with him outside the door, when he would so completely change him that the company would not recognise him. All in the room to sit perfectly still during the interval."

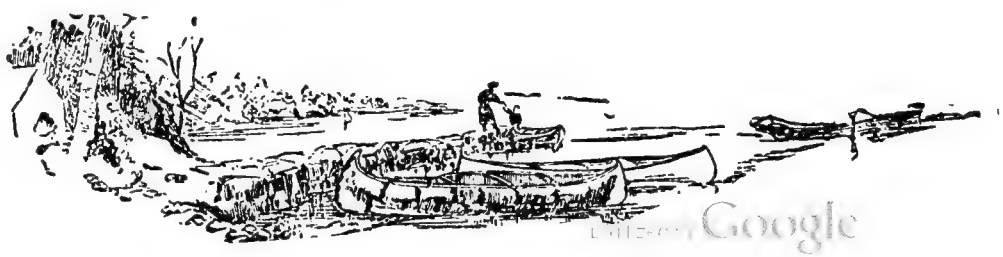
This suggestion was received with a burst of laughter, but as he insisted he could perform the trick, Neville, who was nearly drunk, proposed a bet of £10, which monsieur accepted. Thereupon Neville selected the marquis as the most powerful man in the room, and he unwillingly allowed his hands to be tied, and adjourned outside with his tiny countryman.

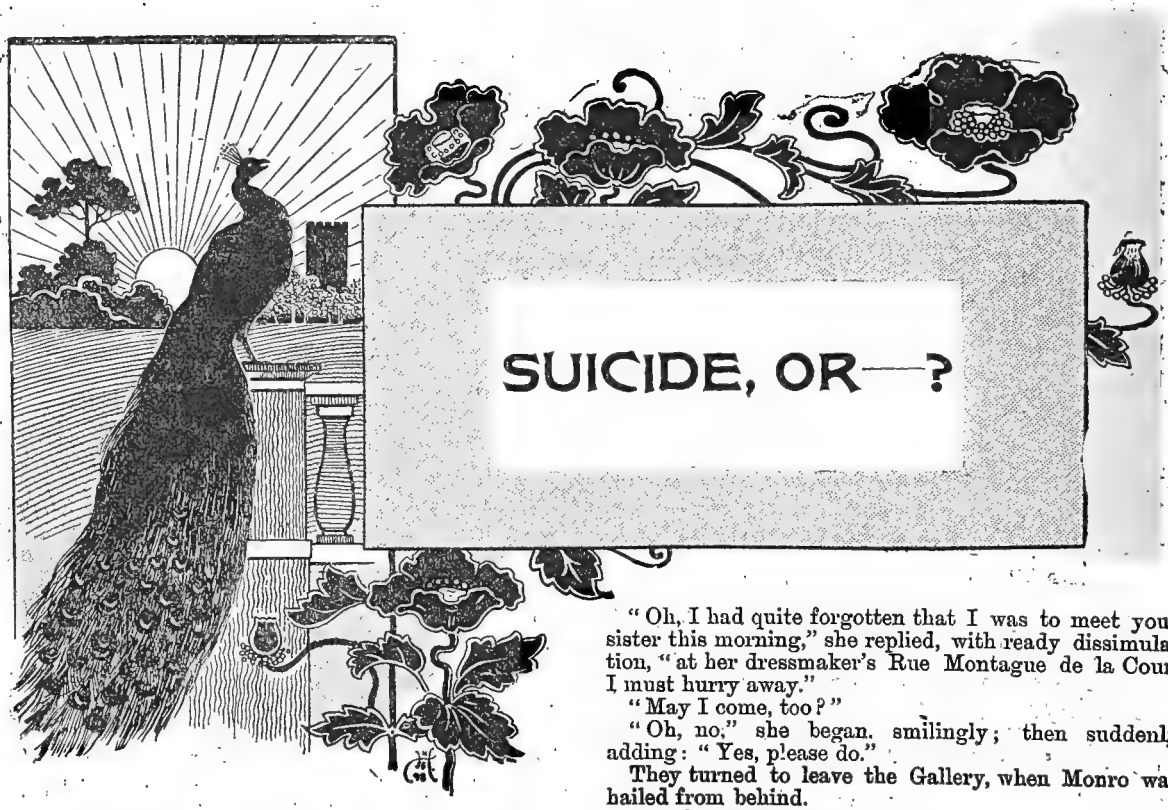
In a few moments we heard curses and oaths in the deep voice of the marquis, and sounds of a deep struggle. We were all highly delighted, and in a few moments a tall, clean-shaven man, with close-cut hair, appeared in the doorway with Mons. Lafette behind him, who was holding, strange to say, a revolver in his hand.

"Gentlemen," said Mons. Lafette in perfect English, "allow me to explain this feat. I had some slight difficulty in performing it, and, thinking that your tying would not be strong enough, took the liberty of putting on these," turning the marquis round and showing us his wrists handcuffed. "This gentleman, who styles himself the Marquis la René, is Jules Farrin, a noted blackleg, whom I daresay you will remember as the murderer of an old lady a short time ago in Paris. He decamped with her money, and all trace was lost. I heard, however, that he was moving in good society in London, and procured a letter of introduction to Mons. Markham, and was fortunate enough to bag the game at the first attempt. I am Mons. Clogue, the Inspector of the Paris Police. Pray, gentlemen, do not let this trifling episode interfere with your evening's amusement. As for you, monsieur," bowing to me, "accept my most sincere thanks for your hospitality," and turning to Neville, said: "I forgive you the wager; it may be consolation to you, as I am afraid my friend has completely sold you. Adieu, messieurs," and he disappeared with his prisoner.

In a few moments we heard a cab rolling away from the door, which was the last episode in Monsieur Lafette's conjuring.

ARTHUR RHODES.





SUICIDE, OR—?

ARCHIE MONRO was undeniably in love with fascinating Mrs. Arnold Marchmont; yet, with the instinct of Scotch caution, even as he looked into her lovely limpid eyes, he could not help asking himself why her husband had committed suicide after three weeks of married life!

Phyllis (Mrs. Marchmont's name was Phyllis) had told him, with tears that made her eyes look softer and more beautiful, what a cruel trial his sudden fit of insanity had been; she blamed him with a touch of hard bitterness in her voice for the suffering he had brought upon her by the inconsiderateness of his end, which killed her affection for him.

As they sat together before the newly-acquired Rembrandt in the Musée de Peinture in Brussels, he longed to ask her then and there to be his wife; he felt *almost* sure that her answer would be yes; but, although the gallery was almost deserted at this hour, he thought it was hardly the place for a proposal. That evening they were all going to the Théatre Royal de la Monnaie, and he was sure to have a better opportunity for tender passages when escorting her to her elegant *appartement* after the opera. But why did her husband commit suicide?

Phyllis Marchmont knew that she was looking very charming, and knew that Archie Monro thought so; she also knew the words that were trembling on his lips, and she even followed his train of reasoning, and knew that his proposal would come that evening. But she was impatient, and longed to hasten the *dénouement*.

"What is the matter?" demanded Monro, tenderly, noticing her give a sudden start.

"Oh, I had quite forgotten that I was to meet your sister this morning," she replied, with ready dissimulation, "at her dressmaker's Rue Montague de la Cour. I must hurry away."

"May I come, too?"

"Oh, no," she began, smilingly; then suddenly adding: "Yes, please do."

They turned to leave the Gallery, when Monro was hailed from behind.

"Archie, Archie Monro."

"Excuse me, Mrs. Marchmont, I will follow you," said Monro.

Mrs. Marchmont walked hurriedly on, and Monro turned back to find his hand violently seized and shaken like a pump-handle by an elderly clergyman.

"Why, Padre, what brings you to Brussels?" said Archie, cordially; "I thought you never left the shores of Old England."

"Why, my dear boy, Maria and I have been to America since I saw you last! Now, I think, we shall never be stay-at-homes any longer. Maria was wild to visit the 'Continong,' but she is knocked-up already with sight-seeing."

"Where are you staying? I must come and see your wife. But I think I must run away now, I left the lady I was with rather unceremoniously."

"If you don't mind, Archie, I want to have a talk with you. I had been watching you for some time, waiting an opportunity to speak to you; but seeing you so *very* much taken up with your companion, I did not wish to interrupt until I saw *who* your companion was."

"Do you know Mrs. Marchmont?"

"I know the lady with whom you were talking, and she knows me; as soon as she saw me she took her departure! If you are interested in her I can tell you a few things about her."

"I am very much interested. I think she is the most perfectly charming woman I know."

"Wait a bit!" said the Padre, rather cynically. "Arnold Marchmont was an old pupil of mine, before your time, and Maria and I were very fond of him.

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When he came of age, for some reason or another, he had to make a will, and asked me to be his executor. For some years I had lost sight of him, then he sent me a paper with the announcement of his marriage to a Miss Phyllis Bryant, of New York—you have noticed a *soupcon* of Transatlantic accent in her? I remembered his will, and thought that my executorship would never come to anything, as his marriage would entail a new will. Three weeks afterwards I had a short notice from the lawyer who drew up the will, informing me that poor Arnold had shot himself, and that he believed no new will had been made since his marriage. Maria and I were very much shocked; we could not believe that Arnold Marchmont was the man to make away with himself. I went to town at once and went to the apartments, in Emperor's Gate, where they had lived since his marriage. I was prepossessed by Mrs. Marchmont's beauty, but the first words she spoke entirely disenchanted me.

"'Oh, the will is no good, you know, as it was made before his marriage.'

"'I am aware of the fact, madam,' I replied coldly; 'but as it seems my poor friend made no other will, I shall take it upon myself to carry out such of his wishes expressed in the existing will as will not interfere with your or any legal rights.'

"'Perhaps you will attend the inquest?' she said, in a tone of annoyance.

"'Certainly I shall,' I replied, decidedly; adding to myself, 'and will thoroughly sift the evidence, too, my lady!'

"Well, nothing came out at the inquest; a servant had heard high voices and quarrelling; then later, Mrs. Marchmont ran downstairs to alarm the house, saying her husband had shot himself. Hers was the only evidence; she acknowledged that they had had a few words about money matters, that he had then retired to their bedroom adjoining; had seized a pistol from an open portmanteau (*hers*, I elicited) and had shot himself. One barrel only was fired, and that so close to the heart that the clothes were singed. The pistol was picked up on the floor, but in what position with respect to the body no two witnesses agreed. Verdict, as usual, 'temporary insanity!'"

"Now, my dear Padre, you are dreadfully prejudiced against poor Mrs. Marchmont. Of course she could not have shot him! Absurd!"

"Just wait, Archie, before you commence her defence. I confess I was prejudiced against the woman, and I determined to find out something more about her than that she was Miss Bryant, of New York. I wanted to know why she had a pistol in her portmanteau. Surely all young ladies of New York do not carry pistols! By one of those strange coincidences which happen in real life, I met, that very day, an old college friend who put me on the right track. He was a doctor, and had been several years in America. I asked him if he knew any families of the name of Bryant in the States.

"'I know a poor, sickly fellow named Bryant,' he said.

"'Has he, by any chance, a daughter named Phyllis?' I inquired.

"'No,' he said, 'he has no family; his wife left him a few months ago because she had got tired of his querulous temper, brought on by suffering. It is thought she committed suicide, as she threatened it and was known to have weapons.'

"A sudden conviction seized me that this was the same woman! You will laugh at the old Padre, Archie, but the doctor put me in the right way to find out the truth, and Marie and I started for America. In three months' time I had the satisfaction of proving poor Arnold's will, for she was not his wife at all."

"Then she is not a widow?" inquiried Archie Monro.

"Yes, she is, *now*; her proper husband died only a few weeks after Arnold was murdered!"

"Murdered! Come, Padre, aren't you content to prove the woman weak and wicked enough in all conscience, without believing that she murdered Marchmont?"

"I have not finished yet! You have noticed her hands?"

"I have. They are beautiful."

"They struck me, when I first saw her, as being of beautiful shape and very white—a trifle too plump, perhaps, but that is being hypercritical. My attention was attracted to a triangular bruise between the thumb and forefinger of her right hand. It was very black and defined; it looked as if it might have been caused by the lid of a heavy tin box falling on it. All the time she was giving her evidence my eyes were continually arrested by this mark; I knew it by heart. In the matter of the will the heir presented Mrs. Bryant with a thousand pounds—which was a generous and uncalled-for thing, but it saved publicity and litigation—and, amongst other things, the fatal pistol came into my possession. My wife was anxious to examine the weapon, which was a large, clumsy one, of American make; I took out the cartridges and gave it to her. Maria held the muzzle towards her breast, saying, 'If he really shot himself, he must have held the pistol so!' She snapped the lock and gave a little scream. *She had pinched her hand with the lock of the pistol!* Next day a black, triangular bruise appeared on her plump white hand, *in the same place and exactly similar to the mark on Mrs. Bryant's after Arnold Marchmont shot*—himself! What do you find in this coincidence, Archie?"

"Not much for a court of law, Padre, but too much for the relationship I contemplated!"

When "Mrs. Arnold Marchmont" and her party were getting ready for the opera, Archie Monro was driving to the Gare du Nord, suddenly called to England, as his note of excuse explained.

E. G.

What is the difference between a policeman and a banker? One is a guardian of the peace and the other a guardian of the "pieces."

Angry Manager: "What did you mean by smiling in that death scene?"

Actor: "With the salary you pay, death seems a pleasant relief."

Unprepossessing Female (to photographer): "How much would you take me for?"

Photographer: "About sixteen, madam."

He got the job.

The railway accident had been a terrible one, and one of the men, who was carrying the thirty-seventh victim up the embankment, said, with strong feeling, "Somebody will have to pay dearly for all this!"

The mangled passenger opened his eyes and glared at the speaker: "The company is not to blame," he said feebly; "this is a dispensation of Providence!"

He was the solicitor to the company.

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Mrs. Grunt's Young Friend.

Cannes.

DEAR HARCOURT,—Would you like some fishing? The May-fly is up, and they send me word from home that it is a splendid trout season. My rheumatism still keeps me an exile here, else, as you may be sure, I should be tackling the wily gentlemen myself. The Grange is quite deserted, but if you care to go and take temporary possession of the old place, Grunt and his wife, at the Lodge, will look after you and see that you don't starve.

Sincerely Yours,

MATTHEW HAWTHURST.

This is the letter I found waiting for me when I came down to my solitary breakfast one bright May morning about two years ago.

"Would I like some fishing?" I exclaimed, "I should rather think I would!" and with alacrity I sat down, and there and then wrote and accepted the old gentleman's invitation.

Before I go any further, reader, I think I had better just explain to you who I am. My name is Dudley Harcourt, my age is thirty, I am in her Majesty's service, and at the time of which I am writing, I was rejoicing in a year's leave home from India.

Old Hawthurst's place, "The Grange," is down in quite the prettiest part of Blankshire, and I must say that the prospect of a few weeks' fishing pleased me extremely; for one thing, not being a particularly sociable being, it was such a very feasible way of getting out of London. I wrote off directly to old Grunt at the Lodge, and told him to expect me by the last train on the next day.

Next morning, however, I changed my mind and went by an earlier train. I arrived at the little rustic station of Darley soon after midday, and, of course, having changed my time, found no one there to meet me, so leaving my luggage with an antiquated porter and shouldering my rods, I prepared to walk up to the old Grange—a walk of about three miles.

Ah! years ago, as a boy, how well I had known this road; my poor old father and I had often come down here together for the fishing. Thinking of these old days, I strolled on, and found myself, almost before I realised it, at my destination.

It was a grim, deserted-looking place. In anticipation of my coming the house was evidently being aired, for all the windows and doors were open.

I walked in at the French windows of the dining-room, intending to make for the smoking-room which adjoined it, when to my great surprise, the most soft and musical voice issued therefrom: it certainly wasn't that of Mrs. Grunt! I stood stock still and listened.

"Down, Pat, down," the voice said. "Bad dog, that's the second time you have nearly made me upset this jug! Sit up, sir, at once!"

I stepped a little more forward, and what could exceed my astonishment when I saw through the half-open door the form of the most lovely girl.

Tall and slender, she stood in her white gown arranging some dusky roses on the rather high old-fashioned chimney-piece.

The sunlight glinted in, and falling athwart her head, turned her hair to burning gold. Sitting up beside her erect on his hind legs, with an air of indescribable reproach in his pathetic brown eyes, was a rough Irish terrier.

It was about as pretty a picture as I have ever seen. Who could she be? I thought, and leant forward so as to better see her face; as I did so, my rod struck against the leg of the table and she looked round. With a little cry she sprang back, her basket dropped from her hand and the remaining flowers fell scattered to the ground.

"I beg your pardon," I said; "I am afraid I have startled you."

For a moment she did not answer; then suddenly a subtle change seemed to come over her face, and, dropping me a demure little curtesy, she said, with the quaintest assumption possible of the Blankshire dialect:

"Oh! no sir, not at all. I'm Mrs. Grunt's young friend as was asked by her to step in and see to the flowers."

Then, picking up the basket and jug of water, she quickly passed me by, and disappeared through the French windows.

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"Mrs. Grunt's young friend!" I slowly ejaculated, and carefully picked up the fallen crimson roses.

* * * * *

A week passed by, and instead of forgetting I found myself growing more and more curious about my fair young friend with the Irish terrier. Innumerable as were the feelers I threw out to that wretched old Grunt, I could learn nothing about her; he seemed to have got deafer even than when I last knew him! Once only had I caught sight of her during that week, and this is how it happened.

One evening after dinner, I had gone down as usual to the river. It was a lovely night, but luck was against me, and I couldn't hook a single fish. For a solid hour I had been tackling one wily beggar, and had just got hopes of him, when suddenly from the bank on the other side of the river a dog set up a most fiendish barking. Of course I lost my fish, needless to say my temper, and hurling some unlovely epithets at the luckless hound, I was about to reel in impatiently, when a sweet voice from the opposite side suddenly broke silvery clear on the air:

"I am afraid Pat has spoiled your sport," it said rather tremulously; "please let me apologise for him; I am so very sorry."

I glanced up, and through the dusky light I perceived before me a grey-cloaked woman's figure.

I rose, but before I had time to answer the apparition was swiftly disappearing across the meadow opposite.

"Who can she be?" I cried, for of course I had recognised the voice as being that of "Mrs. Grunt's young friend!" and there and then I registered a deep and earnest vow to find out who she was, and where she came from.

Next day I set to work in real earnest to gain some information about her.

I went into the village, just a small cluster of cottages, and made inquiries as to the families living in the neighbourhood; there were but three, I was told, two of them were away for the summer, and the third was composed of an old man and his wife and one little grandchild. That was useless, then, so I determined to pay a personal visit to Grunt's cottage.

It was of no avail though, and I might as well have stayed away, for Mrs. Grunt was "upstairs with rheumatics" and Grunt himself was deafer than ever.

No clue whatever could I find, and although I spun out my fishing time for a good six weeks longer, not another glimpse did I catch of "Mrs. Grunt's young friend."

* * * * *

I passed the summer away in yachting, and autumn found me again in London.

It was the 22nd of October; soon my leave would be up, and I should be on my way back to India again. I felt as if I should not be at all sorry to get back to my work, for somehow or another (laugh at me if you like, reader, and say you don't believe in love at first sight) I had never felt quite the same since my spring fishing-time. Try as hard as I might, I could not get the music of that unknown voice out of my head.

Well, be that as it may, on this evening of the 22nd, I found myself struggling into evening kit, and hurrying off to a big "At Home" at Lady Cranthorne's.

I was very late, the rooms were quite crowded by the time I arrived, and I had great difficulty in threading my way through the throng to pay my respects to my hostess. At last I reached her.

"Ah! how do you do, Captain Harcourt?" she exclaimed on perceiving me. "Faithless man! I thought you were never coming, but 'better late than never,' you know, and you are just in time to make yourself useful by singing."

With this, and without waiting for an answer, she led the way to the piano.

"I am awfully sorry, Lady Cranthorne," I began, "but——"

"But you don't accompany yourself, and want someone to do it for you, I suppose," she exclaimed, airily cutting short my excuses, "that difficulty is easily overcome. Captain Harcourt; my niece Marjory will be delighted to come to your aid. Ah!" she continued, "there she is, talking to old Sir John Frere, come with me, and I will introduce you."

She led me over to where a tall, slender girl in white, with her back to us, was deep in conversation with an old gentleman. Lady Cranthorne touched her lightly with her fan, and had just begun:

"Marjory, dear, let me introduce Captain Harcourt," when the girl turned, and, reader, what could have exceeded my astonishment and delight, when, once again, I found myself face to face with "Mrs. Grunt's young friend!"

* * * * *

There is very little more left to tell, reader. Marjory Hawthurst is now Mrs. Harcourt, my wife; in fact, has occupied that position for the last year. The mystery I had chosen to envelope her in vanished into thin air after five minutes' conversation with her at that "At Home" of Lady Cranthorne's. It appears that Marjory is old Matthew Hawthurst's niece. During that spring of which I have written she had not been very well, so had persuaded her parents (not knowing, of course, that I was in temporary possession of The Grange) to let her come down, with her dog Pat as a companion, and pass a few days with her old nurse, Mrs. Grunt, at the Lodge. Wishing for absolute quiet she had told the Grunts not to mention to anyone that she was there, and a week after my arrival she had gone back to London.

That was all. That was the solution of my mystery! One thing, however, I must say before I conclude, and that is, that never to the end of my life shall I cease to remember with joy that day in the sweet springtime when my eyes first fell on, and met those of "Mrs. Grunt's young friend."

M. E. M

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.. From Prairie and Backwoods. ..

IX.—WET HORSES

As I walked down the street of this little Panhandle town—built first where we boys used to chase mustang and hunt buffalo—and I saw something that carried me back on the trail further than my mind ever likes to go.

It was just a rough cage of wire netting, about five feet high, out in front of the "Cowboy's Retreat," with two big mountain eagles in it.

I set my palm against the thing, and leant down and looked in at them. They must have been kept there a good while, I thought, and were used to the curiosity of their inferiors, for they didn't notice me at all.

They sat there in the degradation of captivity; their eyes, that used to look the sun square in the face, were like lead. Their big wings, that were made to carry them a quarter of a mile at a stroke in the clean air of heaven, struck—only half spread—against both sides of the cage at once, as the eagles flopped awkwardly from one perch to the other.

I'm not soft-hearted. I suppose I was as much so by nature as most people; but I've had a good deal to toughen me. The cattle business in all its details including some occasional wholesale starving and freezing in bitter winters; the necessary cruelties of the trail, branding and shipping; the life in general on a wild frontier, I think, has a tendency to stiffen up over tender, sensibilities. But there was a reason why these eagles, sitting dull and hopeless in their low, cramped prison and with no prospect of freedom ahead, touched me uncommonly close.

I went in and had a drink with the man that keeps the place, and found him a pretty decent sort of chap. He told me how he came to get the eagles of the fellow that trapped them, and that he'd had them nearly a year. I had a notion that he took them to settle a bar score, and was sort of tired of them, for I got him to sell them to me for a hundred dollars. Then I took them out to one side, where a lot of fools wouldn't be shooting at them, and interfering with me, and turned them loose. The saloon man and a good share of the population took distant observations of me, wondering, I reckon, what sort of crank had struck the town.

When the cage was lifted off them the eagles stood a minute or so; turning their heads about, lifting and trying their wings. Then they rose heavily, side by side, right up till they looked like swallows; then sailed off, straight as arrows, as though they had seen the snowy tops of the Rockies, four hundred miles to the northwest.

Why did I throw away a hundred dollars to turn a couple of miserable, worthless birds loose out of a cage?

I love a match—a square, stand up game—even to the finish; but I always hated to see a thing that's brave and wild and savage in its nature, in captivity. I'd break a trap any day to let a rattlesnake out, even if I shot it the next minute.

But it was more than this feeling that was at the bottom of my little deal in live stock of the upper air. It was the remembrance of that experience of mine in old Mexico, in the later part of the seventies.

I hate to be made to remember that time. Something in me flinches at it, like a pony that's been struck in the face flinches at a raised hand.

My partner and I went down to old Mexico in seventy-five. I was twenty-five, and Wade a year or so younger We both had a little money, about a thousand dollars apiece, that we'd made from trail work, or droving, and various quiet ways, such as a little side business in branding with a gate rod, or anything that came handy; and Captain Cameron, an old partner of Wade's who was down in Mexico getting rich, hand over fist, sent him word that there was a lot of money to be made there in "wet horses."

I've heard "wet horses" described as stock smuggled across from old Mexico into Texas, and having just swum the Rio Grande; and again as stolen horses, brought and offered for sale while wet with the sweat of a night's chase.

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Anyhow, "wet horses," are understood to be the sort that owe some government a duty, or that have got mixed up in their own minds as to their proper owners; and the horses in which we dealt were very damp indeed.

Cap. took us to a magnificent old Don who was high up in the Mexican army, and had the buying of the horses for the cavalry.

We had an interview. It was a wonderful interview. There was port wine—the finest I ever tasted—and not a word said on either side that the whole government wouldn't have been welcome to hear. But for all the ceremony and Spanish style, the Don gave us the points. When we had left, the understanding was as clear as if we had bargained like horse-traders doing a secret deal.

We were to bring him anything in the shape of horses, procured wherever (and however) suited to us, receive a rattling price, and no questions asked. The Señor Don got his take-off out of the price, of course; but he was a gentleman, and left us still the kind of profit that would have made very rich men of us in a pair of years, if everything had gone right.

We got the horses, mostly, away up in the mountains of Southern Cohahuila, for about one-third their value. Gathered up over a wide district, as convenience might serve the gentlemen who furnished them to us, they were naturally of all sorts, ranging from somebody's well-bred saddle horse down to the meanest little scrubs; but for the most part they were poor stuff.

They were stolen, every hoof of them. But that was not our business. We did not even know those who actually did the work. It was done by regular gangs of horse thieves, and we bought direct of the leaders.

We always went after the horses heavily armed, and had six or eight Mexican drivers, also armed, to take them back. We carried the money with which we paid for them in gold; and in that nest of robbers and cut-throats, where a man's life would be stamped out of him in a minute by one of those sneaking assassins for the price of a drink of *pulque*, it was business lively enough to satisfy even Wade and me.

About nine o'clock one brilliant, moonlight night, we were coming along a narrow mountain pass in Zacatecas. Captain Cameron was ahead, with a little bunch of horses and four drivers.

Wade and I were riding at the rear of our bunch, for every cent we had in the world was in bags of coin, on a little grey mule, just in front of us. We had brought it all to buy a large drove which we had got word would be ready for us, but there was a failure somewhere, and we were going back with only forty horses. It looked queer.

Cap. and Wade, and I, were on the watch, riding with hands on our pistols, and all our arms ready.

We came to a place where the road made a dip, turned a little to one side, and ran through a black shadow, cast down by a bunch of *nopals* on the height above. Cap. rode forward, and his voice came back to us out of this shadow and dip in a fearful yell and a string of oaths. Then there were pistol shots and more yells.

All the Mexican drivers in both Cap's party and ours sneaked away like scared coyotes. They were bribed or won over, I suppose; but they would have done the same anyhow, likely.

Wade and I, with one white boy we had, went ahead with cocked pistols; and there in the pass—partly in the moonlight, as white as day, partly in the shadow—we had a desperate hand to hand fight. That little dark hollow was full of long Mexican knives. There was no running away for us, and the others, who had, maybe, not expected such resistance, were bound, now that they were in for it to have the little grey mule and his heavy coin bags.

When it was done, Cap. lay stretched out dead and ghastly; his face, scrowling and furious, covered with knife wounds, his clothing torn almost off him by clutching hands and wayside cactus thorns.

The Texas boy was dead, not far away, in the shadow.

Wade lay unconscious, bleeding from three wounds any one of which would have taken him to his last account in twenty-four hours.

I had a pistol shot wound in my head, that injured the skull but did not break through it; and in my shoulder was a horrible, gaping hole of a bayonet thrust.

I never knew how many of the other fellows we had done for, but I'm sure we didn't owe them anything. I fainted from loss of blood, and the next I knew, I found Wade and myself in a dirty little adobe hut, with our wounds dressed, in a sort of way, and some water and food beside me. I could hear a sentry shuffling up and down in the front, and one at the back of the house. The roof was partly gone and I judged by the moonlight that it was about one o'clock.

Wade lay and died with his head on my knees. The moonlight, through the broken roof, poured over his face; and at first he looked up and talked to it like a baby. But after a while he got wild and broke out all at once.

"Boys, it's awful—it's awful! I never thought nothin' much about it, never till now. To live like this, year after year! I reckon God made us—we're put here somehow—an' it seems to me were meant to be rather good. We must have been, for look at some men, honest, always a-payin' every cent they owe; never a-swearin' to 'mount to nothin', nor puttin' up their brands on to nothin' that ain't their own; no more thinkin' o' gittin' drunk than as if they wasn't no sich thing; an' they look at shootin', an' knifin', an' killin' of a feller man as awful—awful—couldn't do it, nohow.

"Not angills, ye know, not angills. I've always felt that a angill, here in this world 'd be a mighty uninterestin' monotonous chump to chum with, well-meanin' but no go in 'em. But I know they's sich men as them, I've knowed folks that knowed 'em. Plantation Purvis wuz most that way, an' then think of us, our ways, an' our lives! I've got drunk—always. I've lied, an' swore, an' gambled, an' fleeced fellers out o' the money they'd earned, w'y jest commonly. W'y, when I wuzn't nothin' hardly but a kid, an Slavin an' me wuz workin' that Bar Y range, we burnt out brands, right along. I can't tell all the wicked things I've done!

"Honestly, in a sort o' way, I didn't know no better—I thought 'twas smart. Don't count it all in ag'in me—not all! For as I'm layin' here to die, I sorter didn't know no better. It seemed to me that these fellers I wuz speakin' of, wuz a pore sort o' men, an'—missed a heap—an' 'twuz smart—to—oh,—Heaven—don't—"

He raised one hand like a little child if you go to strike it, and died with the last word and motion.

I tell you it was the worst thing I had to take. It was bad enough before—wounded, stiff, weak with pain and bleeding, stuck like a rat in that miserable hole of a Mexican prison, with every hope of being shot as soon as I could stand up, and Wade lying there in that awful white moonlight, dying—this was enough. But when he weakened so at the last, and I couldn't get him to

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now me, nor quiet him anyhow, when he would run on and on, and on, with that string of terrible talk about things that a well man, free, and among his own people, wouldn't want to have called up to him, it seemed to me as if my time had come to answer up to something that had been keeping a tally on me.

They were strange feelings. I shook all over—and I never was counted a coward. I wished—I didn't know what. I was sick—sick of it all; but to be dead—well, being dead didn't seem to me, like it sometimes had, a good way to end it, and be done. If I could go back and be a child, and try it all over again—but that seemed a mighty long, uncertain way.

I straightened Wade out in the deep shadow, where the moon couldn't get at that look on his face, and drank every drop out of my little pocket flask; and after a while I got to sleep.

Well, I laid in that jail eleven months. Eleven long, dragging, almost hopeless months, without a word of English to hear or read; with nothing to do but eat, and sleep, and think—and I'm not a man that has any liking for that last amusement.

I always hated worse to be hindered than to be hungry. I ran away from home and my father's authority when I was fourteen; and since that time, whether things were good or bad with me, at least there was nobody who could say to me: "You shall," or "You shan't," or lay a straw across the path I pleased to take.

I had lived in the kind of country, and lived the sort of life calculated to make this almost solitary confinement torture.

I used to lie all night and dream of the plains of West Texas—air, light, distance—room for whole nations of people—and wake to find myself—me, that used to have it all for mine—shut in four adobe walls.

I used to own a mount of eight ponies, the best in the whole cattle country. I remember chasing mustang, running antelope and wolves, and hunting buffalo on them, upon those plains where it looked as if you could ride from daybreak till dark, and from horizon to horizon, without a break or a barrier.

And here my limbs were shrivelling in disuse. I could go fifteen feet against a dead wall, and fifteen feet back, against another. And my blood crawled through my veins where it used to leap and laugh.

It was torment at first, absolute torture. Then it was gnawing, cankering, misery.

It was in the summer of '76, in the struggle between Lerdo and Diaz, that this happened,

It was a straggling bunch of thievish guerrillas—calling themselves Lerdo's men—that had taken us, our horses, and our money. I never could tell why they didn't shoot me, to save my board bill and the trouble of guarding me. They had several spells of debating it, but it was always put off for some reason.

There were times when I'd have been glad enough to have them do it.

I hadn't a cent to bribe with, nor any friend who might be reached. And yet, generally, there stayed by me a sort of hope that I would get out of it, after all.

And I did. I was waked one morning from my dreams of liberty by the sounds of rapid firing. There was a big fight going on outside, sure enough. At the noise, and the thought that I couldn't get out, or make myself heard, or raise a finger anyhow, I went perfectly crazy, as men long solitary confined will. I flung myself on the door, swearing, crying, bruising my fists on it, trying to beat it down.

Suddenly, in the midst of the uproar, I recognised that some one outside was battering in the door, and as it toppled forward and the gun barrels appeared over it, I tore open the bosom of my shirt and yelled:

"Shoot here, you dogs and cowards, and shoot straight!"

Oh, I was clean crazy.

It was a troop of Mexican cavalry, which had come up to clean out my captors, who had tried to make a war-play at a government mule train.

There was my old friend, the Señor Don, who bought horses for the cavalry. When he saw me he almost shed tears; and when I told him how long I had been there, where Wade and Cap. and the others were, he sent out and ordered the rest of the prisoners to be shot before breakfast.

He was ready to help me to a new start in wet horses; but I'd had enough. He said, in the kindness of his heart, and that beautiful Spanish of his, that I was his child, his cruelly-injured child. He was a good old boy under all his stuffed, silver-plated uniform and his Spanish spread-eagle.

I took the money he gave me and went straight to the plains as those eagles flew to the Rockies this morning. Didn't I know how they felt when I found them? I guess I did. And I knew what they felt when they spread out their great wings in the mile-high air, took their bearings, and flew toward the crags of their old buccaneering grounds once more; to rear their savage young, or fight, and scream, and plunder in freedom.

"YOUR son is an actor, you say, Mr. Maginnis?"

"Faith, he is."

"And what *rôles* does he play?"

"Rolls, is it? Faith, he rolls up the curtain."

"WHAT is love?" asked an editor. He has since been deluged with answers mostly from the fair sex. One lady says: "Love is an itching of the heart that we cannot get at to scratch."

WE are willing to take a certain amount of stock phrased in newspaper accounts of the late blizzard, but when a New York paper tells us about a zephyr carrying a bed quilt sixty-one miles and then going back for the sheet, we're not there.

"GEORGE," she whispered softly, "mark yonder breadth of cloud, stretching to the utmost part of the heavens—a boundless, infinite sea of nothingness."

"Nothingness?" he echoed. "Why, goodness gracious, Maria, there's a quart of rain in every square foot of that cloud."

"ARE you still taking painting lessons, Mamie?"

"No, I left yesterday; I don't like my teacher."

"Why not?"

"He has such a disagreeable way of talking. He told me that if I kept on some time longer I might be able to whitewash a paling."

"Is your mother ill again?"

"Oh, no; ma is well enough now she has got a new fur-lined cloak for next winter. She played consumption on pa, and coughed, and made pa believe she couldn't rise, and got the doctor to prescribe a fur-lined cloak, and pa went down and got one, and ma has improved wonderfully. Her cough has all gone now."

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THE RED MEN OF THE DUSK.

A Romance of the Seventeenth Century.

BY JOHN FINNEMORE.

CHAPTER XXIII.

GOOD-BYE TO NANT-Y-BRYN!

As if my very words had been a spell to conjure up their forms, the women, who had fled out of the house from the scene of the combat, now rushed into the hall uttering wild screams, which rose high above the dreadful chorus, and, close upon their heels, adding no sound to the wild tumult, but for that very thing striking a deeper note of awful terror, came the wild wolfish figures of the Red Men of the Dusk.

Their naked feet made no sound upon the dark flags of the floor. They glided in, man after man, some lapped in bloodstained wrappings covering wounds gained on the spot from which they had fled but a few nights before, and to which they returned on other footing. For they came as masters now. At first it was not a fight, but a slaughter. The keen pike heads were driven like serpents' stings time and again into the huddled, drunken mass of bewildered retainers, and the terrible sword of Ieuan Gwyelt hewed down man after man.

Even more dreadful and ruthless than the Men of the Dusk, their women swarmed to the attack. Gaunt, savage creatures, their eyes gleaming wildly through foul tangles of matted locks, they drew in behind the fighting line, thrust themselves through it, dropped upon hands and knees, and crept swiftly beneath the pikes, a long knife held between the clenched teeth. Woe to the man who lost his footing in that rude huddle of fight. Like questing dogs, the women sought out the wounded, thrust them down in the press, and stabbed them again and again, with shrieks of ferocious joy, for, unlike the men, they were not silent.

This dreadful apparition of people whom all had deemed utterly broken and vanquished, intensified the almost superstitious dread with which they had ever been regarded, and for awhile the attacked seemed to shrink from measuring strength with them.

In numbers the men of the house still held an advantage, but it was rapidly being lost as the Men of the Dusk plied in ferocious silence their deadly thrusts, and the women shrieked like fiends as they slashed their knives across the throats of the groaning fallen. But the very extremity of the danger drove the garrison to stand stoutly together, and they turned their swords from each other to the common foe. Some of the cooler heads formed a line across the hall and opposed their bucklers to the dripping points, thus giving an opportunity for their slower friends to rally. I saw this was no place for my love any longer, and I leapt up to the stair head, and called upon her. She ran to me, and Siani followed.

"Y Gwylliaid Cochion!" "Y Gwylliaid Cochion!" A score of voices were screaming it. Both of them cried out.

"Yes," said I; "the Red Men of the Dusk have broken in and taken those quarrelsome fellows utterly by surprise, but have no fear, dearest. I do not think——"

I stopped short, for Enid uttered a faint cry and pointed over my shoulder. I turned, but Sir Arthur was a doomed man when my eyes fell upon him. He had just raced into sight, flying upstairs to seek a hiding-place, and had barely set foot upon the gallery when a pike whizzed after him and buried its head deep between his shoulders. He pitched forward on his face, and, as he fell, two half-naked young fellows and a woman ran in on him and drove their knives home together in his body. The woman was old Megan, her great, hollow eyes shining with savage joy, and she plunged in her knife again and again, laughing aloud.

I caught hold of Enid and held her close to my breast to shut out the dreadful sight. She trembled a little and then I held her tighter, for I felt her strength failing. She had received shock upon shock during the day; between grief and excitement she was worn out, and now lay fainting in my arms. I laid her gently down and delivered her to Siani, keeping myself, as our situation demanded, a keen watch below.

The three wild figures struck unweariedly at the object of their vengeance, though life had long since departed, then Ieuan sprang into sight. The young savages showed him their hands, dabbled in the blood as their mother had promised, and Ieuan's face broke into a smile of gratified hatred. Next he spoke hurriedly and pointed down with his dripping sword. He rushed back into the fight, the others followed, and as they went a pungent smell came to my nostrils.

I started, ran down several steps, and snuffed it up eagerly. Smoke, without a doubt, and not of powder either. I saw faint yellow wreaths curling up from one corner of the hall, and my heart stood still. Fire! the place was on fire, and we were up here, and the lower stairs and the hall impassable, for the fight still raged furiously.

"Siani!" I cried. "Quick! Quick! Run with your things to the room where you kept the window. It is our only chance." I sprang up, swung Enid into my arms and ran as swiftly as I could. Siani followed me in a moment, loaded down to the ground. We reached the room safely, and drove home the great iron bolt which fastened the door on the inside. I laid my love down and seized the roll of stuff which Siani had brought.

I drew out a yard or two, made the end fast to the strap which joined the saddlebags, and lowered them from the open window. They were soon on the ground, and this side of the house, as usual, was quite deserted. The doors were on the other side and no paths came this way. When I felt the weight of the bags gone by reason of their settling on the turf, I slashed the stuff across with my sword. There was a strip already hanging from the ceiling, knotted round the beam as I had fastened it in the afternoon. As Siani had cut it across close to the window, the piece left hung nearly to the floor.

I fastened the end of it to the end I had just cut, and we now had a rope to the ground. I pulled several yards more off the roll and made a strong running noose. Meanwhile, Siani was doing her utmost to revive her mistress. I ran across to the door and listened for an instant. The tumult within the house sounded louder than ever, and I smelt the smoke strongly.

"Come, Siani," said I. "We have not a second to lose. We must lower your mistress first for I shall need your aid to lift her through the window and keep the line steady."

I knelt down and arranged the noose carefully round Enid's waist. The broad band held her at once more firmly and more easily than a rope, and I drew it tight and secured it by a knot.

Siani held the line in a grip of iron while I lifted Enid to the window-sill. Then, pressing a kiss on her cold brow, I also seized the linen and we lowered her slowly and carefully.

The slackening of the stuff and Siani's sharp eyes assured us she was safely on the ground, and again the sword grated across the web. Siani bounded out of the

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window and slid nimbly down the line attached to the ceiling.

I followed as soon as I saw her dark figure alight in a heap on the turf. The distance was no more than enough to make my hands burn with the friction of the swift passage and I dropped on my feet like a cat. I found Siani's knife already out and cutting the web from Enid's waist.

As she drew it away I swung up the tall, slender form and made off swiftly up the hill. I ran for perhaps three hundred yards, then stopped. We were clear of the place and I laid Enid on the grass, and Siani, panting up with her load, sprang again to her ministrations. She swept her hands over the grass heavily laden with dew and wetted her mistress's hands and brow. In a few moments a long, fluttering sigh and a slight movement filled us with delight. Then Enid started, and said:

"Oh, where am I?"

"Safe, dearest," I whispered. "Siani and I are here. No one else."

"How did I come here?" she cried. "I must not leave the house. Owain——"

"Look," said I, and took her hand.

From our present position we could see the eastern front of Nant-y-Bryn. A dozen windows had splintered in the heat of the furnace roaring up within, and great clouds of tawny, fire-stained smoke eddied into the night. Then out curled darting tongues of red and yellow flame, leaping higher and higher, and throwing dancing gleams even as far as we stood.

"Fire!" she said. "Nant-y-Bryn is on fire! Oh, my brother. Oh, Owain!" and she wept as if her heart would break.

A knot of yelling figures flew towards us, dark against the fierce red light of the burning house. I drew my sword, and the tinkle of the steel caught Enid's ear. She checked her sorrow with a great effort.

"And I am imperilling your lives," said she, "by indulging in useless grief. Save yourselves."

I returned my sword to its scabbard.

"It is no attack," said I. "'Tis but a clump of fugitives from the house."

Long before the band reached us it melted away, rushing apart from each other, ones and twos scattering in the darkness, screaming women, and shouting men.

I whistled loud and shrilly, Then again and again, but there was no sign of Whitesock.

"She won't be far away, if she's unhurt," said I. Round the south-eastern angle came a band of ponies, galloping, whinnying, throwing up their heels, tossing their manes, and lifting their heads to sniff the smoke. They had been turned on the hillside to graze, and had been attracted and excited by the fire, and were now dashing wildly about the burning house. Cantering easily at their heels came Whitesock. I gave a sigh of relief, and whistled once more. She flew to me straight as an arrow. At sight of the ponies Siani ran towards them at the top of her speed, calling: "Berro! Berro!"

I took the saddle-bags and swung them across Whitesock's quarters, then begged Enid to mount and ride.

"And you?" she asked.

"I intend to walk for the present," I replied. "And at that pace it will be easy for you to sit on my saddle."

I shortened a stirrup to the right length for her, and swung her up. As I did so the soft thud of a pony's feet upon the turf came closer, and up rode Siani, on her brown mountain pony, Berro, whom she had captured from among the herd.

We were now in marching order, and Siani led the way over the open mountain.

"Where away now, Siani?" I asked.

"To Maengwyn," she replied, "about seven miles over the mountain. A good, safe place to stop this night."

"In which direction?"

"To the east," said she.

"Good," I answered, for our future direction must be eastwards, and we pushed on up the long smooth slope. At the crest we paused and looked back. The eastern and southern faces of Nant-y-Bryn were spouting flame at every opening. Every room was panelled and floored with wood, old and dry, and the fire had made swift headway. Good-bye to Nant-y-Bryn! The country about rang with the cries and shouts of the people escaping from that furnace. Of pursuit there was none. As I found afterwards, the Red Men of the Dusk, having broken and scattered their enemies, surrendered themselves to the joy of plundering those parts of the house last reached by the fire.

It was Enid who gave the signal to move. With a last, long look at the grim, old house, now a glowing, fiery blot on the night, and her brother's funeral pyre, she touched the rein and Whitesock stepped forward. Half-a-dozen strides carried us below the ridge, and we were alone in the night.

I walked at the mare's head, and, for the first time in her life, Whitesock marched easily and contentedly with another than myself on her back.

"You see," said I, "this of itself is a good omen. Whitesock understands."

A sudden nickering and whinnying broke out behind us, and Siani's pony answered at once.

"What is that?" I asked.

"It is the grey pony of my mistress," answered Siani. "He is not easy to catch, but he will follow Berro everywhere."

"That's lucky," said I. "We shall be furnished then with mounts, and no more ado. But we'll spend no time with him now. Let him follow to our destination, and it will be easy to take him then."

Within half-an-hour again a red moon came up and put out the stars, and we marched swiftly by her ample light over the dewy grass and by strong hill tracks, until Maengwyn was reached.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Over the Hills to England.

The next morning I awoke just at daybreak, and rolled out of the trusses of hay in which, wrapped in a blanket, I had slept like a king. At the further end of the hayloft the master of Maengwyn and his son snored peacefully. The farmhouse consisted of but one apartment, and had been left to the woman folk. Faint streaks of day showed themselves through the crevices of a shutter at my elbow. I flung it back, and leant out into the cool morning air. What was my next move to be? I drew in deep draughts of the cold, sweet breath of the mountain, and set myself to beat out a safe course for Enid.

"Mistress Whitgift," thought I at last. "'Tis the only sure harbour for her at present."

Mistress Whitgift was Enid's godmother. She was no connection by blood, but had been the bosom friend of Enid's mother. She belonged to an ancient family of Montgomery, and had married over the Marches, her husband having been Aubrey Whitgift, a gentleman of Salop. Aubrey Whitgift was killed fighting under the Earl of Derby at Wigan Lane, and his estates passed to a relative who sided with the opposite party, and his widow was reduced to narrow circumstances. She now lived in a small manor house somewhere between Ludlow and Cleobury Mortimer, and, when first I saw Enid the latter was returning from a visit to Mistress Whitgift.

But the thing craved wary handling. To conduct Enid thither meant to march to a spot within a score of miles of my own countryside, where everyone knew me for a long stretch round. I was just seeing my way through the matter when the door of the house opened, and a grey figure came out.

"No," said I from above. "No; your dark-red riding dress, if you please."

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and "To ride about a wild mountain," said Enid, looking up and meeting my eyes with her sweet, grave smile. "'Tis the only handsome dress I have. And why not homespun?"

"Very well," I replied. "Homespun for to-day if you wish it. But the fitness of things will demand other attire when we get out of the hills if you are to ride Whitesock unnoticed!"

I ran down to her, and we walked out on the hillside, and I told her of what I had been thinking. Mistress Whitgift had been in her mind also, and it was easily agreed between us that she should go there for the present.

"The turn of the tide is coming fast," said I, "and the day will soon dawn when I can walk about openly, and then we will marry and live happy ever after. Meanwhile, you will be safe with Mistress Whitgift."

"But if they seize you before that day dawns," said Enid, drawing a deep breath, "oh, what should I do? Where will you go now for safety?"

"I am coming with you," I replied. "Do you suppose I will leave you until I see you in good hands?"

"With me!" said Enid. "Into the very midst of danger! Did you not say one day that Butley Croft is barely twenty miles from Cleobury Mortimer?"

"I said it," I returned, "and it is true. But within this hour, you shall judge if the clumsy country boor, into which I intend to transform myself, be not a safe companion."

I looked round, and saw Siani at the door, and beckoned her.

"Siani," said I, as she drew near, "the young fellow here is much about my size. Has he a suit of decent homespun to his name?"

"A just new suit," replied Siani. "It iss not two months since Sion Du, the tailor, made them for him. On hiss back, perhaps, twice."

"Well," said I, "take my purse and give him his own price for them. It is useless for me to try and bargain, we cannot talk together."

Siani's keen eye saw my plan at once, and she nodded wisely.

"And the pretty clothes with you now," said Siani. "Will you take them with you?"

"No, no," I answered, "he can have them as well."

"Then it is not sense to give money as well," cried Siani. "No, indeed."

"Give him something, Siani," said I. "After all, it will be very good of him to part with them, if he does."

"If he does," repeated she. "He must!" And away she went.

"Then," I went on, "I shall crop my hair short and shave my face."

"Your hair!" murmured Enid.

"No great harm done," I laughed. "It will grow again, which is more than can be said for my head if that went. In short, you will see an orthodox serving-man riding in the train of a charming young lady."

"Oh," she said, and held my hand tightly.

We went back to the house and found the people eager to do everything which lay in their power to help us. Barley bread, milk and oatmeal porridge were now set on the board and we made a hearty breakfast on these simple provisions.

Then, with her own beautiful hand Enid snipped away my flowing brown curls, and next I passed under the hand of my host, for I am no adept at shaving, and he swept off my short beard and moustachios.

Already I looked very different, as all declared, but when I went again to the loft, and shifted my riding dress for a suit of dark blue woollen homespun, worsted stockings, and clumsy shoes, there was a universal cry of astonishment when I returned.

"Not the same, at all," cried Siani, "Not the same indeed!"

"What think you now?" I asked of Enid.

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"You are very greatly changed, I admit," she replied. "But remember you speak of going to a part where people might be met upon whom even this would not prevail."

"At the first opportunity I will add a great black patch," said I. "You know not the virtues of a patch in the way of disguise. I have seen it do wonders again and again. And I am not yet complete."

I clapped on a big slouching felt hat which the young man had given me, and I was assured that I looked my part to a miracle.

The next thing was to prepare for the road, and by good luck the house could fit us with a couple of saddles, one for Enid and one for myself, for my own saddle was altogether out of character for a serving man to bestride, being too costly, and I cheerfully exchanged it for a rude affair upon which the good man of Maengwyn rode to market. Siani went off at full gallop, riding barebacked, to a house some two miles away, and took money to fit herself out, and was back with the pony harnessed within the hour.

There were droves of animals belonging to Nant-y-Bryn pasturing about this part of the mountain, and the son of the house captured us a strong little brown gelding to serve as a pack-horse. He and I fastened the saddle bags carefully upon it, and everything was ready for a start.

It was about ten o'clock when we plunged into a narrow cwm, which took us out of the sight of Maengwyn in less than a hundred yards, and led us north-eastward across the hills.

Enid was riding Whitesock, and I walked at her side, leading the grey pony, who had followed us to Maengwyn the night before. Siani came behind with the baggage-horse.

Again, Whitesock seemed to understand everything. She ambled on as if proud to carry her beautiful burden, and, after walking half-a-mile, I ventured to slip into the saddle and ride the grey beside her.

"Poor creature!" said Enid. "What a shame to torment her when she is so fond of you!"

For Whitesock was now a trifle uneasy, yet calm again when I spoke to her and stroked her neck.

"In five minutes more," said I, "she will be as happy with you as under me."

"Oh, no," said Enid.

"It is true," I returned. "I know her ways well enough to be sure that she has taken to you for good and all."

It was as I said. A few minutes later I fell back into the proper place for a serving man to occupy. Whitesock turned her eye on me, and when she saw I was not leaving the company but following behind, she moved smoothly forward without a fidget.

Much of this, to be sure, was owing to the manner in which she was being ridden. Enid is a born horsewoman, and her hands are perfect.

All day we rode steadily forward, following tracks well known to my companions. A halt of a couple of hours was made in the early afternoon at a shepherd's hut to refresh ourselves and feed and rest the horses, and, as dusk fell, we rode up to an inn, which I recognised as the place where I had failed to find Enid and Siani, and from whence I had ridden at once to take them from the Red Men of the Dusk.

Here my disguise did not profit me much, for the people at once found out I was not what I seemed. They knew Miss Vaughan and her servant well, and took me, at first, for what I looked. But, naturally enough, they spoke to me in the language of the country, and I was gravelled at a word. When they found I did not understand them they became very eager to probe into the mystery, and set a fellow who had a little English to cross-examine me. From this I was saved by the intervention of Siani, and I saw very plainly the use of a laced coat in gaining one civility at an inn.

The next morning we set off at an early hour, and now I knew the track we followed. We called at the house of the woman whose child I had fished out of the swift little brook, and drank warm, new milk with her. She made no sign that she had seen me before, but that was not wonderful, and no severe test of my present guise.

As we rode that afternoon, Enid decided against staying in Rhayader. In the house opposite the inn lived an old servant of the Vaughans, and I should be again exposed to great inquisitiveness.

The Welsh, and in particular the country Welsh, have an intense passion for prying into other people's business, and the figure I cut of a homespun mountaineer with an English tongue in my head would gall their curiosity mightily.

So we took a cast about Rhayader, passing a couple of miles south of the town, and riding slowly along very bad roads to an inn some dozen miles beyond it.

The next morning I rode beside Enid in earnest talk, for that evening would see us at Mistress Whitgift's house, and we had our plans for the future to arrange. What they were it is needless to mention, for they were shaken to pieces that same night by the march of affairs, and others called for at a short notice.

Our midday halt was at Knighton, and here Siani obtained me a great black patch which I clapped over the right side of my face as soon as we were clear of the place. Enid eyed me anxiously, and even her uneasy heart was at rest when she scanned the appearance I now presented.

We rode across the border into South Salop, then across North Hereford, next into Salop again, and so came to Ludlow. We made no stop here, but marched steadily on aiming to get to Mistress Whitgift's house just after nightfall. A thick, misty evening was gathering around us when Enid pointed to a tall stone we were passing, and said: "It is a mile again."

"We have timed ourselves to a wonder," said I, and rode up alongside, for the road was solitary, and the dusk was deepening fast. Soon we came to a white gate and here Enid drew rein. A little further on could be seen the lights of fire and candle in the windows of a little hamlet.

I sprang down and pushed the gate open. We entered an avenue and Enid brought Whitesock to a stand.

"I will go quietly forward," she said, "and see that Mistress Whitgift is somewhat prepared for our arrival. Her health has been feeble this last year or more and I fear now that this will trouble her."

I helped her to descend, and she went swiftly up the avenue, which led through thick shrubbery to a house some forty yards from the road. The place gave no signs of life save for a faint candle shine at one window.

Two, three minutes passed, and a dark figure came towards us.

"Is it William?" asked Siani.

"Ay, ay," replied a man's voice, and then he added in a tone full of caution, "Come quietly."

We moved on, leading the horses slowly, and drew up at a door in the side of the house. The bags were unstrapped from the led pony and carried in, and then we made our way to the stable beyond.

Here was a lighted lantern hanging from a beam, and I saw that my conductor was an old man, his face full of grief. Time after time he sighed heavily as he helped me with the gear, and so uneasy did this make me that in the end I could not help asking him what was the matter. He looked up as if surprised to find I spoke English freely, and replied that his mistress was ill.

"Seriously ill?" I said.

"She'll never see the morn," he replied.

"So near?" I cried.

"So near," he repeated. "For two days past her only wish hath been to see your young mistress, and how it comes she arrives so pat, I know not, but it seems a miracle that my mistress can bid her farewell, as hath been her earnest wish."

I said no more, but went about my work with very serious thoughts. What was to do now with Enid's friend fast slipping away from her?

(To be continued.)

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- ON - THE BEST AUTHORITY.

C. M.—Half a century ago barrel organs were to be heard in many churches. A barrel generally contained eight tunes; not more than four barrels could be got into one organ. The duties of the organist were then manifestly simple—they were confined to turning the handle.

Driver. — German engine - drivers receive a gold medal and £100 for every ten years of service without accident.

L. D.—London eats nearly half a million tons of fish every year.

Ed.—Most Russian newspapers keep "a man of straw" as responsible editor. In return for the use of his name he draws a salary of about £200 a year. In the event of prosecution, the man of straw has to stand fire. If the judgment is against the paper, he has to go to prison. Some time ago, the libel editor of the *Novoe Vremya* was sentenced to four months' imprisonment. It was the first piece of work he had done for some years, although he had been regularly drawing his salary all the time.

G. K.—Twenty-five years ago there roamed over the plains and mountains of the Far West nearly 8,000,000 buffaloes. To-day there are fewer than 600 head of the animal in existence.

Ins.—There are about twenty men to one woman holding life insurance policies.

L. M. wishes to be informed how the picking up of water while a train is moving is accomplished.————The water lies in shallow troughs between the metals. As soon as the engine is over one of these troughs, the driver lowers into it a scoop from the tender. The rush of the train forces the water up the scoop into the tank with such rapidity that the latter is filled in a few seconds. The utmost promptitude must be exercised in withdrawing the scoop when the tank is full, for if this is not done at once the tender may be flooded to such an extent that the fires are put out.

H. O.—At Munich there is a hospital which is chiefly supported by the sale of old steel pen nibs, collected from all parts of Germany. They are made into watch springs, knives, and razors.

S. E.—The torpedo depôt ship *Vulcan* is a veritable box of machinery. In all—reckoning those of the various torpedo-boats and small craft which she carries—she contains ninety-three engines.

H. L.—In the Dominion of Canada alone 900,000 square miles are yet unexplored.

Vision.—The strength of vision in savages proves to be much less extraordinary than was supposed. Dr. Behrheim, on a visit to Johannesburg, has tested the sight of 1,853 Kaffirs, Basutos, Hottentots, Zulus and Bushmen, finding 1,509 with normal vision equal to that in Europeans, 257 with stronger sight, and 87 with weaker. Phenomenal vision was shown by a Kaffir girl of fourteen, who perceived objects at sixty feet away as well as a normal white could at twenty feet.

A. K.—One man in every twenty meets with an accident yearly.

G. R.—It is estimated that the value of salmon and migratory trout taken in English and Welsh waters in an average year is slightly over £150,000.

Point.—It is strange that the use of points for purposes of punctuation should be such a comparatively modern invention. Of the four generally used points, only the period (.) dates earlier than the fifteenth century. The colon (:) is said to have been first introduced about 1485, the comma (,) about 1570. It is difficult to understand how the literary world dispensed for so many centuries with the useful points, and their lack must have added to the toil of the decipherer of written documents. When we remember what curious pervertions of meaning may be caused by the misplacing of a comma we marvel how early authors contrived to escape strange misreading of their works, in which no points guided the students.

J. E.—Seven hundred million oranges are exported every year from Europe to America.

Leaf.—The highest trees have most pointed leaves.

T. K.—It seems that the ladies of the harem possess a wonderful capacity for disposing of sweetstuff. France alone exports to Turkey and Egypt for the harems 1,600,000 francs' (£64,000) worth of various expensive sweets annually.

Tins.—In Paris the thousands of sardine and other tin boxes that are thrown away every month form the basis for an industry which has reached vast proportions. These refuse cans are stamped by machinery into tin soldiers, and sold so cheaply that the poorest children can possess them; yet the manufacturer makes a fair profit, which he could not do if he used new material.

S. P. C. A.—England holds the honour of having first formed societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals, and of having first legislated for its punishment.

I. C.—Yes. Black ice cream was once tried as a dainty in France. The cream was tinted with the juice of Turkish prunes, and looked more novel than appetising.

Z.—A Brazilian lady never goes shopping. Servants are sent for samples, and if it is a bonnet the senorita wants to buy, a box or basket containing all the latest Parisian styles is sent up for her inspection.

L. T.—The thinnest and at the same time one of toughest, leathers tanned is a frog's skin.

Smoker.—The Hollanders are perhaps of all the Northern peoples the se who smoke the most. The humidity of their climate makes it almost a necessity, and the moderate cost of tobacco with them renders it accessible to all. To show how deeply rooted is the habit, it is enough to say that the boatmen of the *trekschuit*, the aquatic *diligence* of Holland, measures distances by smoking. From here, they say, to such-and-such a place, it is not so many miles, but so many pipes. When you enter a house, after the first salutations, your host offers you a cigar; when you take leave, he hands you another, and often insists upon filling your cigar-case.

Student.—The income of Oxford University is about £70,000.

Colon.—Out of every five emigrants three are males.

T. M.—For its size, Athens possesses the largest number of barristers of any city in the world. There are 750 out of a population of 130,000 inhabitants. Athens, too, is a city of doctors. The University sends out hundreds of barristers and doctors every year. All cannot obtain employment in their professions, and many take to politics.

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